NOVEMBER
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PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure

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Hugh Pendexter
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Chief Caupolican
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William Byron Mowery
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Charles Tenney Jackson
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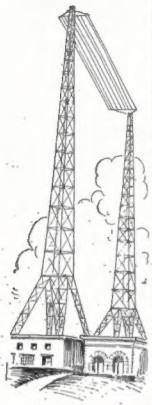
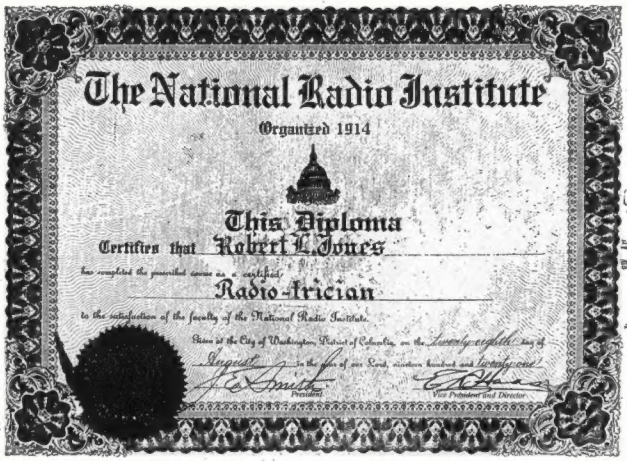
3 Complete Novelettes

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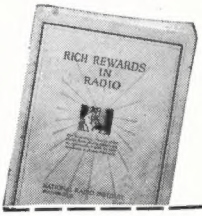

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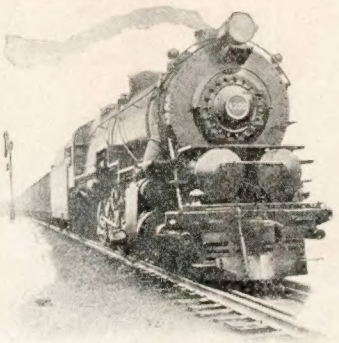
ADVENTURE
Nov. 30th, 1924

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 49
Number 6

The Health Carriers



OUR youngsters laugh when we tell them that old Mother Hubbard went to her cupboard and found it bare. For them the jingle is only a bit of humor, and they are quite sure the old dame promptly went to market and then—food aplenty.

But to folks of many lands, the bare cupboard is a nightmare bringing up instantly the specter of famine. India, with three times our population, has had nineteen famines in the last century and a half. In China, during 1876-79, more than eleven millions died from famine. In both countries there was food for every one but no way to transport it fast enough to save life. India had less than 30,000 miles of railroad and China's only railroad had been destroyed.

If we are immune to famine, it is largely because we have 375,000 miles of thoroughly efficient railroads. As long as their growth is encouraged and they are allowed to function freely, food scarcities will be relieved before they become acute. But our railroads have sometimes been hampered and in October of 1921 they were threatened with a complete stoppage.

At that time, the authorities of the district of New York with eight million people to care for, were at their wit's end. The flour would be exhausted in a month; the fresh meat in a week. The fresh milk so essential for babies and invalids would be gone in a day and storage was out of the question.

The whole country was alarmed. The farmer saw himself rich in grain, but poor in flour; robbed of his markets, and cut off from supplies, with his car and motor-truck powerless; his children sick, and medicines unobtainable.

But the crisis passed, and all of us continue to enjoy the *balanced ration essential to health;* fresh meats, fresh vegetables, fresh fruits, fresh eggs, fresh milk.

So, when at night, we hear the panting of the ponderous freight train, heavy with health-giving products of farm and field, let us breathe a prayer of thanks that we live where brains, money, vision, brawn, pluck, and grit have made New York and San Francisco neighbors and have set the orange groves of the Southern states beside the vast wheat fields of Canada.

Our railroads fetch and carry from every corner of the land. Their efficiency is personal to every one of us. They are indispensable health carriers.

With only 6% of the people of the world, we have 50% of the railroads and the most effective railroad service that has ever been known.

The freight rates of Canada and the United States are the lowest in the world, and the railroads pay more than $1,000,000 a day in taxes.

Our Government tells our railroads how much they may earn, how much they may charge us for their service, how much they should pay their men. It supervises their bookkeeping and it knows where every dollar comes from and where it goes.

The railroads carry us from town to town and do it well, but they make their living in a service that is even more important, the carrying of freight. For every passenger coach, they have forty freight cars. And their great achievement is not even the tremendous number of freight cars—2,500,000—but the ice cooled cars, almost unknown in other lands, which carry our perishable foods thousands of miles and deliver them in perfect condition. So, whether you travel or stay at home, the railroads are serving you every minute of the day.

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Nov. 30, 1924
Vol. XLIX No. 6

Adventure

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising sixty-three geographical sub-divisions, with special sections on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons Past and Present, Salt and Fresh Water Fishing, Tropical Forestry, Aviation, Army Matters, United States and Foreign; and American Anthropology North of the Panaman Canal.

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One Novel and One Novelette Complete

HE QUIT the Army Air Service and said good-by to its planes; he quit the Secret Service to work for himself; but when he hit Lockett, the booming oil town, he found himself back in harness again. "GROODY AMONG THE GUSHERS," a complete novel, in the next issue.

"LOOK at her," he gasped. "The old witch—dead and rising from the sea! She points at me. No—she beckons. But *I will not go!*" "BLACK IVORY," a complete novelette by J. Allan Dunn, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one

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***Adventure* is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

What the Old Timer said to Charley

by C.L.Hardy

"ONLY a few years ago, Charley, the man whose name you see on that door was just where you are today.

"I remember the day he came to work for us. He didn't know much about the business. But he was always asking questions—always anxious to learn.

"And by and by we got to noticing that Billy Stevens was getting ahead of some of us old fellows who had been around here for years.

"I can remember as clearly as though it were yesterday, the day Billy showed old Tom Harvey how to figure out the pitch of some new bevel gears we were making on an important contract.

"Tom told me afterward how respectful Billy was—nothing fresh, or 'I know it all' about him. He just made a suggestion and showed Tom a quicker way to start the problem and a shorter, surer way to finish it.

"One day I said to him—'Where'd you get hep to all that fancy figuring, Bill?' We were eating lunch and he was reading some little book he always carried. He looked up at me and said innocently: 'Oh, I just picked it up!' I knew different than that, so I quizzed him until he told me the whole story.

" 'Did you ever notice the old men around the shop,' he asked—'the men with families who drudge along day in and day out—never getting anywhere?' I admitted that I had noticed quite a lot of them.

" 'Well,' he said 'I made up my mind I wasn't going to spend my whole life in a humdrum job at small wages. So I took a home-study course with the International Correspondence Schools that would give me special training for this business.

" 'I tell you frankly that I never dreamed it would be so fascinating and so helpful in my work. I'm making mighty good money—twice as much as formerly—and I'm going to have even a bigger job around here some day.'

"Well, Charley, that boy went straight on up. The members of the firm heard about his studying in his spare time and encouraged him to keep on. You see where he is today.

"And I—I'm still plugging along at the same old job—struggling to make both ends meet. I had just as good a chance as Billy Stevens, but I let it slip by. Yes, I let it slip by.

"Now, Charley, you've got to want your training bad enough to go get it. That's as far as I can help you; you've got to do the rest yourself.

"I've seen a lot of young men come into this business. Those who went ahead were always those who trained themselves for the job ahead. You can do the same thing.

"Start now! It will take only a moment to sign and mail that coupon. It doesn't obligate you in any way. But it's the most important thing you can do today. Some day I know that you will come to me and thank me for what I'm telling you."

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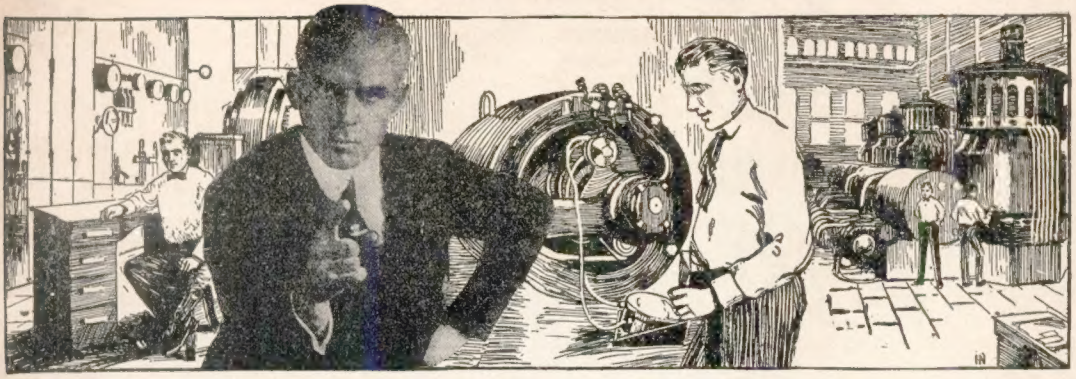

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The Trey of Spades

A Complete Novelette by W.C.Tuttle

Author of "The Dead-Line," "Just for a Laugh," etc.

"THIS looks like the place, 'Sleepy.' In all my years, this is the first time I ever seen just the place to settle down. Look at the wide places, cowboy. Away over there is the river, cuttin' almost down the center of it. Them green cañons are showing plenty of water, and look at the feed."

"Hashknife" Hartley lifted his lean head, as he swung one long arm in an arc, encompassing the length and breadth of the Thunder rangeland. Sleepy Stevens, his companion, humped in his saddle, rolling a cigaret.

"Feast yore eyes upon her, cowboy," urged Hashknife seriously. "She's the range of our dreams. No fences and danged few ranches. If it was made to order it couldn't hit closer to what we've wanted."

"Gimme a match," said Sleepy indifferently.

Hashknife fumbled for a match, but did not take his eyes off the panorama before him. Behind them and on both sides stretched the Thunder Mountains, half-encompassing a rolling range that only ended in a hazy distance—hundreds of square miles of rolling hills, small valleys, dotted with cottonwoods and live-oaks; an ideal cattle range. Far away, in the middle distance, the Bitter River pursued its irregular course; a green thread that split the land in twain.

"Yuh ought to give me a match with a head on it," complained Sleepy. Hashknife turned in his saddle and squinted at him. There was a hint of reproach in Hashknife's

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thin face, as he produced another match and handed it to Sleepy.

They were unlike, these two. Hashknife was well over six feet in height, bony, angular, with long arms and generous-sized feet. His face was bony, nose long, mouth large. The hair that showed from under his back-tilted sombrero was of the neutral shade. His eyes were gray-blue and set in a network of wrinkles.

Sleepy was of medium height, rather heavy of build. His face was blocky, and wrinkled from the weather and an over-developed sense of humor. Both men were dressed in well worn cowboy clothes. Their horses looked weary, thankful for the siesta in the shade of the cliffs behind them.

"They don't put enough —— on their matches these days," complained Sleepy as he barely managed to ignite his cigaret and puffed contentedly.

"Yuh ought to be glad we can find somethin' without too much —— on it," grinned Hashknife, turning back to his survey of the landscape.

"I reckon that's right," agreed Sleepy. "Kinda pretty view from here, ain't it?"

"Kinda!" Hashknife snorted aloud and turned his head. "My gosh, that's the place we've been dreamin' about——"

"Who's been dreamin' about?" demanded Sleepy indignantly. "Don'tcha mix me up in that dream, Hashknife. The only ones I ever have are a dream about me bein' at a dance without nothin' on but a pair of socks. Huh! By golly, I'm the only danged view that ever shows up in my dreams."

"You ain't got no imagination, Sleepy."

"The —— I ain't! Don't it take imagination to think yo're at a dance without nothin' on but——"

"I don't mean that kind of imagination, Sleepy."

"Oh, you mean the mild kind, eh? Well, I dunno about me. Prob'ly I do go a little too strong. The last dream I had——"

"Sleepy, I feel that this is the place we've hankered for. Right here is the place where we can speak about, when folks asks us where our home is. There's peace down there, cowboy."

Hashknife's eyes were soft and speculative as he turned to Sleepy and motioned toward the country below them.

"God A'mighty made that country for cowpunchers, Sleepy. He sure knowed what they needed. And if they ever bring barb-wire into that paradise it'll make the angels weep. Me and you will go down into her and we'll find a little spot for ourselves.

"Mebbe we can buy out a small brand down there. We don't need much, do we? We'll start small, cowboy—and we'll never get so big that we'll forget that we stopped here to live peaceful. We've got enough money to give us a start."

Sleepy squinted at Hashknife and turned away to look out over the sun-swept hills. He slowly cleared his throat, shifted in his saddle and looked at Hashknife.

"Me and you never had a home, Hashknife," Sleepy's voice was wistful. "We never had a place to speak about when folks asked us where we was from. All our lives we've just been driftin' along, singin' our song. And it ain't always been easy travelin', cowboy. The old boy with the scythe has just barely missed us on several occasions, and it sure seems like he's swingin' closer every time.

"Down there it looks good, Hashknife. It sure looks like a land of milk and honey; a land that's so filled with peace that the coyotes have filed off their teeth and learned to eat grass. It looks like all of that, and more—but any old time yuh think it's like it looks—yo're cockeyed and crazy."

"Thasso?" Hashknife smiled softly.

"Thasso?" mimicked Sleepy. "Yo're danged right it's so. Me and you have always looked for a peaceful range. Hashknife, it's like lookin' for the end of the rainbow. There ain't no such animile. No range is peaceful."

"I dunno about that," Hashknife shifted in his saddle and picked up his reins. "Anyway, a man can make his own peace."

"Even if he has to make it with a six-gun, eh?"

"All peace is brought about through battle, Sleepy."

"Sounds fine," Sleepy gathered up his reins and settled in his saddle. "I'll make yuh a proposition, Hashknife. We'll go down into this country, find us the right kind of a place, if we can, and settle down.

"If there ain't no ready-made peace, we'll make some for ourselves. But right here and now, we'll both agree to let other people's troubles alone. To —— with the whole gang, eh? We'll fight for our own from now on. Is that a go?"

"Well," said Hashknife slowly, the corners

of his mouth twitching slightly, "that's a good idea. It won't hurt us none to agree to mind our own business. I'm in favor of it. All my life I've been hornin' into other people's business, and it'll be kind of a relief to know that I'm handlin' my own troubles."

Sleepy grinned softly, as they rode off down the ridge, heading for the lower ranges; going into an unknown land. Far beyond the green ribbon of the Bitter River a tiny thread of smoke showed the passing of a railroad train, heading toward Oxbow, the county seat.

Lower and lower they went down across the rolling hills. Range cattle stared wide-eyed at them, or raced away through the brushy coulées, wild as deer.

"Fat as butter," observed Hashknife. "Box M brand, mostly."

"Betcha it gets colder'n —— in the winter," said the pessimistic Sleepy.

"Mebbe we can buy us some skates," suggested Hashknife.

They both laughed as they swung around the head of a brushy coulée and angled down through a thicket of greasewood. Hashknife, who was in the lead, suddenly drew rein. A horseman had ridden across the coulée below them, riding low in his saddle and flogging his horse at a stiff gallop.

It was only a glimpse and the rider was gone.

"What do yuh make of that?" wondered Hashknife. "I'll say that he was hurryin'."

"Kinda racin' for a train or trainin' for a race," grinned Sleepy. "Mebbe he was cuttin' around some stock. That brush is so tall that yuh couldn't see his horse."

"Couldn't even see much of the man," smiled Hashknife, as he urged his horse ahead.

The heavier growth of greasewood forced them to swing lower into the coulée, and they managed to angle their way to the left at a point approximately where the rider had entered the coulée. An overhanging branch swept Sleepy's hat off his head and he swore softly as he dismounted to recover it.

Hashknife rode on slowly to the edge of the thicket, where he drew rein and turned to look back at Sleepy. A moment later something struck the fork of his saddle a terrific blow. The horse swung sidewise and from beyond them came the *spang* of a high-powered rifle.

Hashknife flung himself sidewise out of the saddle and crashed down into the greasewood. Sleepy had not mounted, and now he came running low in the cover, six-shooter in his hand.

"Hashknife!" he called softly. "Hashknife, you —— fool, why don'tcha answer me?"

"Gimme a chance," grunted Hashknife. "I'm all tangled up in this darned brush."

"What did it hit?" asked Sleepy, his voice showing relief. "I heard the bullet hit somethin', Hashknife."

"Hit my saddle, I reckon. Can yuh see anybody?"

"Yuh don't hear me shootin', do yuh? Which way did it come from?"

"The way we was pointin'. Keep yore danged head down, can'tcha? I've got seven feet of greasewood up one leg of my pants, dang the luck. How in —— am I goin' to get loose, Sleepy? I can't bend her over so I can slide loose from it."

"Jump seven feet in the air," chuckled Sleepy.

"I'll prob'ly do that, if the bushwhacker discovers me in this condition."

"Take yore knife and slit the leg of yore pants, Hashknife."

"Yeah—and I ain't got no other pants."

Came a burst of soft profanity and a sigh of relief. After several moments:

"Cut it off with my knife."

"Yore leg?"

"Naw—the greasewood. Seen anybody yet?"

"No such luck. My trigger-finger has gone to sleep. C'm'on and help me look for 'em. This is yore peaceful land, Hashknife. Milk and honey!"

Hashknife came crawling out of the brush. His face was badly scratched in several places and one sleeve of his shirt was ripped from cuff to shoulder, but otherwise he was all right. His horse had swung around and moved to lower ground, where it managed to tangle the reins in a bush.

Hashknife examined his six-shooter carefully and squinted speculatively at the brush around them.

"Goin' to set here and wait for 'em?" queried Sleepy, who wanted action.

"Debatable question, Sleepy. I figure that they thought they were shootin' at the gent we seen foggin' across the coulée. If we had showed any sense a-tall we wouldn't 'a' crossed his trail. The question is this: Was he right or wrong?"

"What do yuh mean?"

"Just wonderin' whether we ought to help him or not. Question of persecution or prosecution."

Sleepy wrinkled his nose disgustedly.

"There yuh go," he declared. "A while ago we agreed to let the troubles of others alone."

"Yeah, that's true," nodded Hashknife. "I suppose we ought to sneak out and get away the best we can regardless."

"They dang near killed yuh," reminded Sleepy, who did not like the idea of sneaking away from trouble.

They had been talking softly, but their ears had been alert for the least noise. There was nothing foolhardy about either of them, neither were they the least excited over the fact that a bullet had narrowly missed killing one of them.

The fact that it had missed was sufficient for them. Several years in the worst ranges of the west and southwest had made them confirmed fatalists; caused them to look upon death as something that would not come to them until their "time" had arrived, and resolved to meet it with a grin.

Just beyond them and to the left the hill was covered with a growth of greasewood, showing here and there a cropping of granite. A loose rock bumped down through the brush, dislodged by some one or something. They looked quickly at each other and Hashknife shook his head slowly.

"Too careless," he whispered. "Watch the other side."

They snuggled lower, paying little attention to the side of the hill, and were rewarded by seeing the stealthy approach of a man, who was worming his way through the greasewood with the skill of a savage.

He was going slowly, weaving his way along. The heavy thicket behind which they crouched prevented him from seeing them. Now another rock came rolling down the side of the hill, but this time they heard the unmistakable sound of the rock being thrown onto the hillside from a distance.

Hashknife grinned and held his gun in a position to cover the approach of the man, who was almost into them now, while Sleepy kept an eye on a possible approach from the hillside. Then the man crawled into the opening, about ten feet from them, and turned his head to look into the muzzle of Hashknife's gun.

The man was of medium height and weight, grizzled, with a heavily lined, bronzed face and a pair of steady gray eyes. In his right hand he held a heavy Colt revolver. For a moment his eyes held a startled expression, which quickly changed to one of evident relief. His hand relaxed from around his gun and he lifted himself to a sitting position.

"Kinda nice weather for this time of year," said Hashknife pleasantly.

The man nodded and glanced back on his trail.

"Yeah, it is," he agreed. He lifted his left hand and rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "There seems to have been a mistake made."

"Does kinda seem thataway," agreed Hashknife. "At least it had us wonderin' what it was all about."

"Um-m-m." The man's face widened into a grin.

"Yuh might as well call the rest of 'em in," said Hashknife. "They'll get sore arms from throwin' rocks onto that side hill."

The man turned, disclosing a sheriff's shield on the lapel of his vest, and called loudly:

"Hey! Buck! Come on in!"

"Aw-w right," called a voice. "Comin' right along, Jud."

"Yo're the sheriff, eh?" queried Hashknife.

"Yeah. My name's Farley—Jud Farley."

"Mine's Hartley," grinned Hashknife. "This here curio with me is Sleepy Stevens. My friends call me Hashknife."

"Glad to meetcha," nodded Farley, as a tall, raw-boned, sandy-haired man came clawing his way through to them. He looked at Farley and glanced quickly at Hashknife, who still held his gun in position. Farley's gun was lying on the ground, and this seemed to greatly concern the newcomer.

"Tha'sall right, Buck," assured Farley. "My hand got tired. Buck, meet Mister Hartley and Mister Stevens. Folks, this is Buck Hardy, my deputy. Buck, do yore little bow."

"Aw, what the ——!" growled Buck.

Hashknife laughed and shoved his gun back into its holster. This action seemed to relieve Buck, who almost smiled as he put away his own gun and reached for the makings of a cigaret.

"One of you fellers almost got me," declared Hashknife. "The bullet tore half of my saddle-fork loose."

"That was me," said Buck slowly. "I dunno what's got into me lately. 'Pears like I'm shootin' too low all the time."

He said it with such sincerity that Hashknife laughed outright, and Farley's eyes twinkled with laughter.

"Buck's a good shot," offered Farley.

"I used to be," admitted Buck.

"Well," laughed Hashknife, "I'm glad it happened now instead of the used-to-was. That shootin' was too good to suit me. But you haven't said just why yuh shot at me."

"Yuh didn't happen to be gunnin' after the jasper that rode through here a while ago, did yuh?" queried Sleepy.

"Did you see him?" Thus Farley quickly.

"Just about. He wasn't paradin' to any extent."

"What color horse was he ridin'?"

"We didn't see," said Hashknife. "We were up the coulée a little ways and just got a glimpse. This brush hid the horse, and the man didn't go slow enough for us to see what he did look like."

"He was the whippoorwill we were after," stated Farley, and added disconsolately, "By this time he's erased himself plumb off the map."

"Who was he?" asked Sleepy.

Farley smiled sadly and shook his head.

"Pardner, I'd sure give a lot to know."

"He's a —— fool!" snorted Buck indignantly. "Any man that does what he's done and wants folks to know that he's the jigger that done it—he's plumb crazy, tha'sall."

"We call him 'The Trey of Spades,'" said Farley slowly. "That's his trademark."

"Trade-mark?" queried Hashknife.

"Uh-huh. He's a lone bandit—and a slick one, Hartley. This is the nearest we've come to gettin' him. About four o'clock this mornin' he went into the Cheyenne gambling room in Oxbow and stuck up the crowd. There was only seven men in there. He sure cleaned up a nice piece of change.

"He backed out of there, but at the doorway he took a playin'-card out of his pocket and flipped it back at 'em. It was the trey of spades. Me and Buck was just ridin' in from a trip to Snake Creek, and we hit Oxbow just about the time that this was goin' on.

"We seen this feller break for his horse. Somebody yelps that the Cheyenne has been held up; so me and Buck takes out after this feller. It was bright moonlight, and we sure runs him ragged, but we can't stop him. Can't tell the color of his horses either. Back about two miles from here he holes up in the brush and we think we've got him dead to rights, but he foxes us and gets away.

"Buck gets a glimpse of him foggin' out; so we slides right after him. We're pretty close behind him, and we've got a hunch that he hived up here again; so yuh can't hardly blame us for takin' a shot at yuh."

"Sure looked to me like he was lookin' over his back-track," said Buck. "I dunno what's wrong with me, anyway. By golly, I used to be able to hit a tomatter-can at that distance. Gotta fix them sights, I reckon."

"Yuh don't need to on my account," grinned Hashknife.

Farley picked up his gun and shoved it into his holster.

"Well, Buck, I reckon we might as well ride along and see what we can see," he observed. "This is just another time when we didn't get the game."

"I s'pose so—dang the luck." Buck yawned widely.

"Which way is the town from here?" asked Hashknife.

Farley pointed west:

"Out thataway about ten miles, I reckon. About three miles from here you'll hit the road that leads past Maverick ranch. Keep goin' straight ahead and you'll hit Oxbow."

Hashknife and Sleepy mounted and rode out past where the sheriff and deputy were preparing to circle the coulée. Buck looked with gloomy eyes upon the havoc caused by his bullet upon Hashknife's saddle.

"Mebbe," he said hopefully, "that bullet hit a limb and was deflected. It could happen, yuh know."

"Anybody would think that yo're sorry to miss me," observed Hashknife.

"No-o-o, it ain't so much that as it is gittin' to feel that yore shootin' is gittin' bad. I used to shoot pretty good."

"C'mon, Buck," laughed Farley, and then to Hashknife, "Hope we'll see yuh ag'in, Hartley—both of yuh."

"Y'betcha," nodded Hashknife. "We'll be around here for a while, I reckon."

"This here land of milk and honey," scoffed Sleepy, as they rode away. "A land

of peace, Hashknife. I'll bet there's more real —— to the square inch around here than any place we've ever hit."

"Well, it won't affect us," laughed Hashknife. "Yuh must remember that we're goin' to mind our own business from now on."

OLD "Dad" Parker sat on the front porch of the Maverick ranch house and looked with gloomy eyes at the rider who was coming past the house, heading toward the bunk-house. The rider was Cliff Parker, Dad's twenty-seven year old son, a wild young blade.

Just now his clothes were disheveled, dusty, and his seat in the saddle was none too secure. In fact, Cliff Parker was drunk—disgracefully drunk. He half-fell from his horse in front of the bunk-house, staggered inside and slammed the door.

Old Dad shook his head painfully and squinted off across the hills, his old eyes misty with sorrow. In his younger days, Dad Parker had been a powerful man, but now he was a gaunt, old man, with a mop of white hair, a deeply-lined face; an old, old man at sixty.

As he settled back in his chair a girl came to the doorway. She was a slender, capable-looking girl, attractive of features and with a wealth of soft, brown hair. There was a smudge of charcoal dust on her cheek, and her arms, bare to the elbow, bore evidences of contact with the flour barrel.

"I've been making some doughnuts, Dad," she offered, with a smile. "Harmony said they wouldn't be worth anything, but they look good."

The old man nodded without looking at her. She studied him for several moments, her eyes shifting toward the bunk-house, where Cliff's horse stood.

"Cliff came home?" she asked softly, but he did not reply. Slowly she shook her head and a look of unutterable sadness came into her fine eyes, as she stepped out behind old Dad and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Some day he will quit it, Dad," she said softly. "Cliff's only a kid."

"He's almost thirty, Milly." Dad Parker's voice was husky. "He's old enough to know better. Every time he goes to town he gets drunk. He's gettin' a bad reputation for drinkin' and gamblin'."

"Yes, that is true," nodded the girl. "He loses more than is good for him."

"His cattle are all gone," said the old man. "He sold the last ten head a week ago and I suppose the money is all gone."

The girl turned away. She knew that Cliff had also sold four horses during the past week, which left him with only one, his favorite riding horse. Mildred Parker was not at all like her brother. Their mother was of French descent, impulsive, hot-blooded; and Cliff had inherited his wild traits from her side of the family. Mildred was twenty-three.

As she turned away she saw two strange horsemen swing off the main road and ride toward the house. It was Hashknife and Sleepy. Dad Parker watched them indifferently, as they rode up close to the porch and lifted their hats to the girl.

Their smile was contagious and Mildred found herself smiling back at them.

"We just stopped," said Hashknife rather lamely. "We might say we stopped for a drink of water, or to ask the way to Oxbow—but we know the way, and we ain't dry. We stopped, tha'sall."

Mildred laughed with them. There was something so straightforward about the lean-faced cowpuncher that she liked him instinctively.

"This is the Maverick ranch, ain't it?" queried Sleepy.

"This is the Maverick ranch," replied Dad Parker. "Get off and rest your feet, gentlemen."

"We didn't aim to stop," protested Hashknife, "and I don't reckon we will." But he was half-way off his horse as he finished. They dropped their reins and came up the steps.

"My name is Parker." The old man had got to his feet and held out his hand. "Folks call me Dad. This is my daughter."

Hashknife introduced himself and Sleepy, and Mildred brought some chairs from the living-room.

"We just can't stay long enough to set down," protested Hashknife. "No, ma'am —honest to gosh."

"Running away from some one?" asked Dad, a twinkle in his eye.

Hashknife laughed and fumbled for the makings of a smoke.

"No, not that. We're kinda stubborn when it comes to runnin' away. Nope, we just didn't want to bother yuh."

"You haven't had any dinner, have you?" asked Mildred.

"Dinner?" Hashknife looked up quickly. "Yes, ma'am. We couldn't eat a thing, thankin' yuh just the same."

Hashknife turned to the old man and Mildred looked inquiringly at Sleepy, who stared at her for a moment. It was a look of understanding, but to make it more expressive, Sleepy reached down and cinched up his belt another notch.

Mildred laughed softly and turned into the house, while Sleepy wrinkled his nose joyously and rolled a cigaret. He was hungry, and he knew that Hashknife was half-starved.

"This is the first time we ever got into this range," offered Hashknife. "It sure looks good."

"It is good," declared the old man. "It's hard to beat the old Thunder range, Hartley. We've got everythin' here."

"Even to sheriffs that shoot on sight," said Sleepy.

Dad Parker turned and stared at Sleepy. "I didn't quite get that."

"Well, they do," declared Sleepy. "One took a shot at Hashknife and tore half the fork off his saddle."

Hashknife laughed and hastened to explain the incident. Dad Parker listened closely until Hashknife had finished.

"That was a close call, Hartley," he said slowly. "And it was not a pleasant introduction to our country. You say this bandit held up the crowd in the Cheyenne this mornin'?"

"That's what the sheriff told us."

"And sooner or later Jud Farley will get him," declared Dad Parker. "Farley is a good man. This bandit will leave his card once too often."

"Is he a rustler, too?" queried Hashknife.

"Not yet. He confines his robberies to hard cash. As yet he has made no big hauls, but he seems to have nerve enough to pull off any kind of a job."

"Any suspicion of who he is?"

"No. He laughs behind his mask, talks like a man suffering from a heavy cold, and rides like the ——. He has never been seen in the daylight; so no one knows the color of his horse."

"Kinda interestin'," mused Hashknife aloud. "I like his idea of identifyin' himself with a playin'-card. It's like somethin' yuh read about."

"He probably read about it." Thus Dad Parker dryly. "There's a wash-bench around by the kitchen door, if you feel like takin' a wash. I think that 'Harmony' has about prepared the dinner."

"A little wash won't hurt us," laughed Hashknife, getting to his feet. A rider was turning in from the road, and as he neared the porch he waved at the old man, who motioned for Hashknife and Sleepy to wait.

The man rode up and dismounted. He was a man of possibly forty years of age, with a pale, esthetic face, deeply set, dark eyes and a sensitive mouth. From his garb it was plain to see that he was of the clergy, although he wore a sombrero hat and high-heeled boots.

As he removed his sombrero he disclosed a partly bald head above his high forehead. His horse was a decrepit gray, which had long ago outlived its usefulness on a cattle range, and his riding rig was of the poorest.

"Get down, minister," said Dad Parker pleasantly. "You are just in time for dinner."

"Perhaps," the minister smiled, "perhaps I timed it, Mr. Parker."

Dad laughed and indicated Hashknife and Sleepy.

"This is Mr. Hartley and Mr. Stevens, two newcomers to this country. Gentlemen, shake hands with the Reverend Jones, the man who rides on his church."

Hashknife laughed as he shook hands with the minister.

"I never knowed one to ride a church before," said Hashknife.

"Perhaps Mr. Parker is right, at that," said the minister. "In this country a horse is more valuable than a pulpit."

He shook hands with Sleepy, who made a wry face after the minister had turned away. Mildred came out and greeted the minister warmly.

"We will set another place at the table," she said, as she turned and went back into the house.

Hashknife and Sleepy went to the wash-bench near the kitchen door and began their ablutions. Mildred was in the kitchen, talking to some one, whose voice immediately rose to a higher pitch.

"Well, my ——, who next! What do they think this is—a caf-fay? Preacher, eh? Ten Commandments and a appetite! Mebbe he'll expect a yaller-legged hen, won't he? By grab, I don't do nothin' around here, except work. Somebody always showin' up at meal time. I wisht I had a job herdin' sheep!"

"Oh, I'm sorry." Thus Mildred's voice sorrowfully.

"Yuh don't need to! Don't waste sympathy on a cook. They're the lowest order of humanity. Put a plug hat on one and he's still so low he could walk under a snake. What does he drink—except liquor?"

"Tea, I think." Laughing.

"Tea? Aw right. Give'm skim milk. I know that jigger. He'll want to ask the blessin', won't he? Thank the Lord for somethin' that I cooked, eh? That's all the thanks I git. If I saved his life he'd thank me through somebody else, I s'pose."

Came the banging of pans, as the cook vented his further displeasure on the utensils. Hashknife laughed joyously.

"That's Harmony."

"A human bein'," Sleepy spluttered through the towel. "I'm for Harmony. Didja notice that preacher's grip? Just like takin' hold of a dead fish. By golly, I was afraid to let go of his hand for fear it would fall in the dirt."

The cook came outside and looked at them. He was a short, heavily built man, with grizzled hair, wrinkled face and a walrus mustach. He glared balefully at the two cowpunchers for several moments before a grin overspread his face.

"Jist tryin' to figure out which one of yuh was a preacher," he said huskily. "Milly said we had comp'ny, but didn't say how many, yuh see. Then she aidged in on me and said that the preacher had arrived."

"Yo're Harmony, ain't yuh?" asked Hashknife.

"Yeah," Harmony spat viciously. "I'm the best —— cook in the county. Harmony Hobbs, that's me. A disciple of peace and a promoter of brotherly love. I'll have harmony, if I have to bang —— out of everythin' and everybody to git it. Howdy!"

They shook hands gravely and Hashknife introduced himself and Sleepy.

"Hashknife Hartley, eh? Didja git that name from the old Hashknife outfit?"

"Uh-huh."

"By ——! Say, it's a small world, Hartley. Didja ever know 'Saleratus' Smalley, who used to cook for that outfit?"

"I sure did," laughed Hashknife. "Did you know him?"

"No, but I knowed a man that did. It's sure a small world, ain't it."

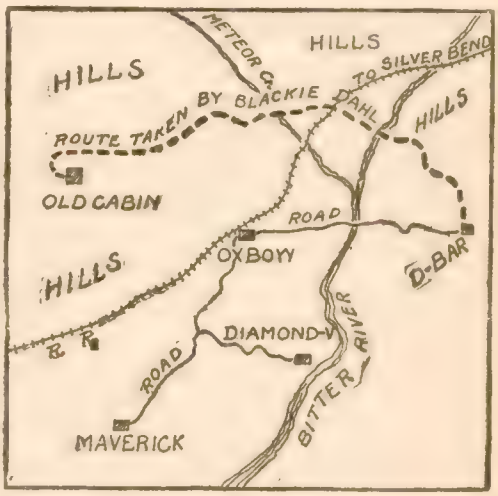
"Yeah, it ain't very big," laughed Hashknife.

"Uh-huh. Well, well! You sneak around to the front and come in with the main herd, gents. Dinner is get-at-able, right now. And don't forget to bow yore heads."

They laughed and went around to the porch, where the minister was talking to Mildred and Dad Parker. Harmony's gong sounded its announcement and Dad Parker motioned them all into the dining room, where they sat down at the big table.

Harmony bustled around, placing food on the table, while they all waited for the minister to begin. Even Harmony stopped at the doorway, obeying some hereditary impulse, in spite of the fact that he outwardly detested ministers.

As they bowed their heads and the minister's voice began in sonorous tones to



invoke a blessing upon the food, there came the scrape of a boot heel on the threshold of the dining room and a soft laugh of derision.

Every one looked up quickly. Half-way inside the doorway stood Cliff Parker, a dark, thin-faced youth, handsome in spite of his lines of dissipation. His black, curly hair was in disorder, and there was a smear of blood on his cheek from a recent cut. Around his throat was a scarlet muffler, the ends swaying down over the front of an ornamented vest. He was still wearing a pair of heavy, bat-winged, beautifully stamped chaps, and around his waist was a heavy belt and holstered gun. His feet

were encased in a pair of high-priced, extra-high-heeled boots.

He was still half-drunk, wholly sarcastic, reckless. As he encountered his father's rebuking glance he laughed softly and glanced around the table. Harmony swore softly to himself, but it was audible to every one.

"More Sunday school, eh?" Cliff's voice was as vibrant as a harp string. "The Reverend Jones is with us again. This makes three times in a little over a week, don't it?"

"Cliff!" Dad Parker started to his feet. "What is the matter with you, son?"

Cliff laughed nastily and rocked slowly on the balls of his feet. His eyes narrowed, and he licked his lips. The minister was looking at him wonderingly, and Hashknife was inclined to feel sorry for him.

"——psalm singer!" sneered Cliff angrily. "Ridin' all over the country, preachin' hell-fire and brimstone—and gettin' free meals. I suppose it's a fair trade, though."

"Cliff, be still!" warned his father hoarsely. "Don't forget what you are and where you are. The minister is my guest."

"You can have him," Cliff laughed and leaned back against the wall. "You think he's comin' here to save our souls, don't yuh? Souls, ——! He's got a different reason than that, Dad."

The minister's face had gone a shade more pale and his eyes shot sidewise at Mildred, who was gripping the table-cloth as she stared at her brother. It was a plain inference that the minister was coming there to see Mildred, and Hashknife knew from the minister's actions that Cliff was not far wrong in his suspicions.

"What do you mean, Cliff?" Dad Parker spoke softly now. He knew that there was no use antagonizing Cliff in his present frame of mind.

"Mean?" Cliff laughed. "Do you think that the sky-pilot is droppin' in here so often just to see you—or me? Do yuh think that our souls mean anythin' to him? Mebbe you can stand for a Gospel shark in the family, but I can't."

"Cliff!" Mildred's face flushed angrily, as she got to her feet. "Cliff, you have no right to say such things?"

"Is that so?" Cliff turned angrily on her. "If you don't *sabe* him—you're kinda dense, Milly. I figured him out a long time ago."

The Reverend Mr. Jones got slowly to his feet and turned to Cliff. He had recovered his composure now.

"I am sorry you feel as you do," he said slowly. "There is no use in telling you that you are mistaken, because you have made up your mind as to certain things." He turned to Dad Parker. "Mr. Parker, I am more sorry than I can say, and I sincerely hope that this will not affect our friendship."

"No, don't go—yet," begged the old man. "This is not a thing that can——"

"Please." The minister gave a gesture of impatience. "It is only an unpleasant situation that might be relieved by my absence. I will say good afternoon, and be on my way."

He nodded to those at the table, turned and went out through the open door, leaving Dad Parker facing his erring son.

"Well, go ahead and explode, Dad," said Cliff airily.

"Explode?" Dad Parker considered his offspring. "No," he said slowly. "I am not goin' to explode."

"That's good," Cliff turned his head and looked at Harmony, whose mustache was jerking spasmodically. "What are you cryin' about, Harmony?"

"Huh?" Harmony looked up quickly, "Who the ——'s cryin'?"

"Then yuh was laughin'," declared Cliff. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself—laughin' at a preacher."

"Cliff, we still have guests—strangers," warned Mildred.

"I seen 'em," nodded Cliff, shifting his eyes to Hashknife and Sleepy. "I'm not apologizing to anybody today. Anyway, they don't look like the kind of people yuh can apologize to and make 'em believe it; so I won't try."

"We're not askin' for an apology," said Hashknife.

"That's thoughtful of yuh," said Cliff sarcastically, as he turned and walked out of the room. They heard him clump down the porch steps and walk away from the house.

"I don't know just what to say," Dad Parker turned back to his chair and looked at his guests.

"Then don't try," said Hashknife softly. "Whether yore son is right or wrong, he spoke his little piece in public. Now, let's forget it."

"I'm goin' to thank you for that,

Hartley," said the old man, as he sat down. "I can't understand Cliff."

"Well, he had no right to say what he did," declared Mildred warmly. "I think he owes me an apology."

"I think these are among the best biscuits I ever ate," said Hashknife seriously, "and that coffee would make any man leave home and hunt for a job on the Maverick ranch."

Mildred was forced to smile at Harmony who beamed upon Hashknife and hurried away for another supply of biscuits and more coffee.

"I dunno why yuh specify any certain thing on this table," stated Sleepy. "'S far as I can see, it's the best line-up of reg'lar food we've surrounded in a long time."

"I'm glad you like it," said Mildred.

"Like it," grinned Sleepy, "——, I love it!"

Sleepy's inelegant compliment brought a general laugh and the former unpleasant incident was shelved for the time. They finished their meal and went out on to the porch. Cliff was in front of the bunkhouse, talking to another man who was sitting on the steps, holding the reins of his horse. The animal was a tall, bay horse of racy build, and the sun sparkled on an ornate saddle of black leather and silver.

"Fancy lookin' outfit," observed Sleepy, as they sat down to enjoy a smoke.

Dad Parker frowned slightly, as he nodded and said:

"That is Vincent Roche, owner of the Diamond V ranch. His place is about twelve miles west of here."

"Rides a runnin' horse," observed Hashknife admiringly.

"Yes, he is a little particular," agreed Dad. "That saddle was made for him in Mexico City, and the horse cost a big sum. Roche is a plunger. I can't admire his style, but there is no question of his nerve or ability."

"Mebbe yore son is tryin' to imitate him," suggested Hashknife.

"That is the whole trouble," said the old man sadly. "Roche and Cliff are altogether too friendly. Here he comes now."

Hashknife and Sleepy studied the man as he walked up toward them. He was well dressed, athletic looking, with a free swing to his stride. Except for a weak chin, Vincent Roche was a handsome man. His eyes were cool, calculating, widely spaced; his forehead was broad. His ears seemed to be fitted snugly to the sides of his head, and there was a well-groomed look to his closely-cropped brown hair.

"Hello, Mr. Parker," he called pleasantly, as he came up to them and held out his hand.

"Hello, Vincent."

The old man was cordial enough, as they shook hands. He introduced Hashknife and Sleepy, and Roche accepted the introduction in an indifferent manner.

"Hear the old Cheyenne was held up this mornin'," said Roche smiling. "The Trey of Spades keeps up his deadly work, it seems."

"They'll get him one of these days," declared Dad Parker. "He can only last so long, Vincent."

"Yes, I suppose so," Roche seemed thoughtful. "I suppose it all depends on how long he keeps workin', but you can't expect him to quit, as long as things come easy."

"Easy come, easy go," quoted the old man. "He will keep it up too long, Vincent. They always do."

"Well," Roche laughed, "I suppose it is unlawful to say so, but I hope he keeps goin' for a while. He's a sport. It takes a lot of nerve to stick up a saloonful of men. And I kinda like his idea of a trade-mark, it keeps him from being identified with the common herd. Is Mildred in the house?"

Without waiting for an answer Roche brushed past them and went into the house, where he began talking to Mildred. Dad Parker sat down and they resumed their smoking.

"This is a pretty big range, ain't it?" asked Hashknife.

"Yes, pretty big," replied Parker. "Lots of beef shipped out of here. Oxbow is the big shipping point. Quite a lot of horses shipped out of here, too; and they're worth money now."

"I wonder where we might get jobs," said Hashknife. "It looks like a good range, and we'd kinda like to work a while and look it over."

"With an idea of going into the business?"

"Possibly."

"I don't know. There's the Box M southeast of here. They run a lot of cattle. Old 'Flint' Moore owns the place. Feller by the name of Delaney is foreman. There's ranches scattered all across the county, and any of 'em might need a good man or two.

I—" he hesitated for a moment—"I might use a couple myself."

"You mean that you need two men?" asked Sleepy quickly.

"I might."

"Dad, I reckon you've had two punchers move right in on yuh." Thus Hashknife seriously.

"Well, I suppose it's all right," Dad Parker grew thoughtful. "I really can use two men. I've only used one extra man up to this time. 'Honey' Davis quit me to go to work for Roche the other day. I ain't worth nothin' in the saddle any more, and Cliff—well, you see how it is. Yes, I guess you are hired, if you want the jobs."

"And all the time you've been talkin', we've been on yore payroll," said Sleepy wonderingly. "Hashknife, we better hit for Oxbow and load up on tobacco, 'cause we've got a job."

"Forty a month and food," said the old man.

"The forty don't interest me," grinned Sleepy, "but the food does. C'mon, Hashknife. We don't want to be late for supper."

THE sheriff and his deputy gave up the chase after an hour more of searching for further trace of the bandit, and rode back to Oxbow. The sheriff, in spite of several failures, was confident of ultimately putting the Trey of Spades behind the cell doors of his little jail.

But Buck, the deputy, was not so optimistic.

"My shootin' is goin' back on me," he complained. "Can't make out why I didn't salivate that skinny jigger. I've got to do better than that, Jud."

"Oh shut up!" snapped Farley. "Be danged glad yuh don't have the blood of an innocent man on yore hands."

"How do I know he's innocent, Jud?"

"Hm-m-m!" Jud Farley wrinkled his brow in thought.

"There ain't nothin' to show that one of 'em ain't the Trey of Spades," continued Buck. "We don't know 'em. They sure showed up there at a queer time, dontcha know it? How do we know that the Trey of Spades ain't a stranger in this country? We don't. By grab, mebbe I missed nailin' him to the mast."

"I don't think so, Buck," replied Farley. "That horse never showed any signs of runnin'."

"Thasso? Say, didja ever stop to think we didn't get a look at the other horse—not close to? That animal was back there in the brush. By golly, you've got to use yore brains in this kind of a job."

"Foresight, not hindsight, Buck," smiled Farley. "The time to have thought of that was when we were there. It's too late now."

"Well, gimme credit for thinkin' when I did," requested Buck.

"All right. Better late than never, I suppose."

"I ain't supposed to do it all," muttered Buck. "I'm only the deputy, yuh must remember."

"You try rememberin' it, too," retorted Farley dryly, and Buck was squelched sufficiently to keep still for a while.

Oxbow was mildly interested in the return of the sheriff, although no one was surprized to see him come back without a prisoner. "Slim" Cole, owner of the Cheyenne, was volubly profane. The Trey of Spades had taken about five hundred dollars from Slim and he was very peevish.

In fact he was so peevish that he kicked Shy, the three-legged black cat, which was supposed to be the mascot of the Cheyenne gambling house.

"You're goin' to have bad luck for that, Slim," declared "Sufferin'" Stockton, who dealt faro for the house. He was so nicknamed because of the many ailments that beset him, most of them being caused from perusing a medical book.

"The —— I am!" snorted Slim. "Goin' to have, am I? Say, Sufferin', you're about ten hours late on your prognosticatin'. I've had my hard luck."

"Kickin' a one-legged cat won't help yuh none, that's a dead immortal cinch."

Slim glared across the table at Sufferin' and said—

"Just where abouts in —— do you feel bad?"

"Liver. Spots in front of my eyes, short breath. Kinda ——"

"Yesterday yuh had symptoms of tuberculosis. The day before that yuh had an ulcerated tooth and a double-headed carbuncle."

"All right—" Sufferin' grew sad—"mebbe I did. By grab, yuh don't get no sympathy, no matter what yuh get, around here."

"Know what you'll have tomorrow, Sufferin'?"

"Feller never knows from one day to the other, Slim."

"You're goin' to have blisters on your feet—from runnin'—if yuh don't quit diagnosin' yourself. You make me sick."

"Your liver is out of kilter, too," declared Sufferin'. "Late hours and liquor."

"Hey! You gamblin'-house dudes! C'mon up and have a drink of yore own liquor."

"Blackie" Dahl had come in during Slim and Sufferin's argument and yelped at them from the bar. Blackie was a regular contributor to the Cheyenne's exchequer, and too wild-eyed in his actions to brook a refusal to drink.

Blackie was wild, irresponsible, quick to anger. He owned the D Bar outfit and a chronic thirst. His was one of those little "starve-to-death" places, as they were known, and it was hinted that Blackie's herd was composed of, and supported by, mavericks—unbranded calves.

Blackie was well named. His hair was as black as the proverbial raven's wing, and he wore it long. His face was thin, evil, and his brown eyes were always bloodshot. There was nothing refined about Blackie Dahl. He boasted that his loop was wide.

"It's all grist that comes to my mill," he declared. "If it ain't accordin' to Hoyle—let 'em stop me."

The inhabitants of the Cheyenne responded with alacrity and Blackie snorted contentedly, as they lined up at the bar.

"What's all this talk about the Trey of Spades?" he asked Slim, who explained about the holdup.

"After I left here, eh? Knew too much to show up while I was here. I'd 'a' sure shot the rest of the deck loose from him. Roche was here, wasn't he?"

"He left here about two o'clock," volunteered Sufferin'.

"Loser, as usual, eh?"

"Roche broke about even last night," said Slim. "Cliff Parker lost about two hundred. I reckon he left about an hour after Roche left."

"And the Trey of Spades comes along and takes the whole pot, eh?" Blackie laughed delightedly. "That whippoorwill is a dinger. I'm for him, by——!"

"Wait'll he nicks you for a wad," said Sufferin'.

"Me? Ha, ha, ha, ha! Wait'll he does, Sufferin'. He knows who to fool with. What did he look like?"

"Had two legs, two arms," said Sufferin', checking them off on his fingers.

"Yeah, and he had a head, too!" snorted Blackie angrily. "You jug-heads didn't even take a good look at him. It was like takin' candy from a baby!"

Hashknife, Sleepy and Dad Parker were coming in and those at the bar ceased their conversation. Dad Parker had decided to ride to town with them. He spoke to those at the bar.

"C'mon and have a drink, Parker," invited Blackie.

"Thanks, Dahl," smiled Dad, "but you know I neither drink nor smoke."

"Yuh don't, eh?" Blackie's lips curled in a sneer. He knew that Dad Parker did not drink, and that it was through no ill-feeling that he declined, but Blackie's brain was slightly warped from too much liquor. "C'mon and have a drink, I said!" he snorted angrily, as the old man started toward the rear of the room. Dad Parker turned and looked at Blackie, a smile on his lips.

"Thank you just the same, Blackie—I do not drink."

"You jist think yuh don't." Blackie surged away from the bar and advanced toward the old man, grasping him by the lapel of his coat. "When I say 'drink', they drink, Parker. C'mon!"

"Aw, he don't drink, Blackie," said Slim, crossing to them and trying to persuade Blackie to desist. "Don't do that. He's an old man."

"Yea-a-ah?" Blackie whirled on Slim, his eyes blazing. "Where do you git in on this, Slim? You mind yore own —— business, will yuh? I asked him to drink with me, and he'll sure drink. C'mon, you old bible-back!"

"He don't drink, pardner." Hashknife spoke clearly, a half-smile on his lips.

Blackie whirled and looked at Hashknife closely. For several moments he considered these two strange cowpunchers, as if wondering that any one would interrupt his pleasure. Then he came slowly toward Hashknife, squinting quizzically at him.

Hashknife's lips smiled, but his eyes were serious. He did not retreat; so Blackie stopped a few feet away, where he glanced questioningly around at those at the bar. His gaze came back to Hashknife and he

licked his lips delightedly as he said—

"I didn't quite git what you said, feller."

Hashknife looked steadily into Blackie's eyes, which wavered slightly.

"Yo're a liar," said Hashknife softly.

Blackie's right hand jerked nervously, but he did not reach for his gun. There was something in those level eyes that told him to wait a while.

"That's a fightin' word," he said hoarsely.

"That's why I used it."

"Oh!" It was more than Blackie could understand. He shifted his feet nervously. "That's why you used it, eh?"

"Yeah, I thought you was lookin' for trouble."

"Thought so, didja?"

"At first. Now, I know you want a chance to run."

"Oh, the —— I do?" Blackie fairly bristled.

"Right now you wish I wasn't here."

"Well, you've got some —— queer ideas, feller."

"Mebbe I have. I've met yore kind before. Yo're all kinda hard to insult. In fact I don't think it can be done."

"Yeah? Are you tryin' to insult me?"

"Spit on his boots," advised Sleepy dryly. "Mebbe he'll *sabe* that."

"Who the —— are you?" growled Blackie.

"I'm the guy that cleans up the mess after the big feller gets through," grinned Sleepy.

"Tough *hombres*, eh?" Blackie laughed. "If you came to Oxbow lookin' for trouble, I reckon yuh can find it."

"I don't think so." Hashknife shook his head and half-turned toward the bar. As he turned away Blackie's right hand flashed to his gun, which seemed to fairly hop from the holster to meet him. But before it could swing level, Sleepy's gun jarred the whole room and Blackie staggered sidewise, his gun falling to the floor.

Blackie stumbled into a table, caught himself with one hand and swore viciously as he tried to find out how badly he was hurt. The bullet had ripped across the front of his chaps and smashed against his six-shooter between the cylinder and the butt. It had taken a chunk out of Blackie's second finger and the shock had numbed his hand and wrist.

"You dirty coyote!" Sleepy walked over to Blackie, who cringed back against the table. "I've got a good notion to bend this gun over yore empty head and collect bounty on yore ears. You'd be a bad man—behind a bush."

"That was a dirty trick," agreed Slim. "And I think that Blackie got off cheap. By golly, that was straight shootin' if anybody stops to ask yuh."

Blackie scowled and stepped away from the table. He had nothing to say. He was shocked sober now. His finger was bleeding badly and he looked curiously at it.

"Better bind it up," advised Hashknife. "The bone ain't busted, is it?"

Blackie shook his head.

"No, it's all right."

Jud Farley and Buck Harker came cautiously into the place and looked around.

"Heard some shootin'," stated Farley, squinting at Blackie's bleeding finger. "Didn't know but mebbe the Trey of Spades had showed up agin."

"That's a question," said Hashknife slowly.

Blackie turned and shot a malevolent glance at Hashknife as he walked outside without saying a word. Farley watched him go out through the door and turned to Hashknife.

"What happened, Hartley?"

"Lemme tell it," begged Sufferin'. "My ——, don't let a story like that git ruined in the tellin'."

"Go ahead," grinned Farley. "You won't dare to lie, 'cause a lot of yuh all seen the same thing."

Sufferin' grinned and launched into his story, which lost nothing in the telling. Farley listened closely, thoughtfully. He knew Blackie Dahl fairly well. In fact he had tried at odd times to catch Blackie stealing cattle, but failed.

"He's a bad boy," agreed Farley, after Sufferin' had finished. "Also it isn't good policy to merely disarm a man like Blackie. It's like takin' a fang out of a rattler."

"I hardly ever kill a man, unless I have to," said Sleepy dryly. "Of course, sometimes yuh have to work on 'em the second time, but that's all right. It kinda makes yuh feel that yuh didn't act too hasty."

"Um-m-m!" Farley squinted at Sleepy, whose face was as innocent of guile as that of a year-old baby.

"I'll buy a drink," stated Slim Cole. "By golly, I will. And I'll buy a lemonade for Dad Parker."

"Well," laughed Dad, "I might have taken a lemonade with Blackie and saved all this trouble. But I won't quarrel with you, Slim."

"Don'tcha try it," said Slim seriously. "I'm no fool."

"I'll do my best," laughed the bartender. "I know that yuh put lemons and water in it. These here fancy drinks sure do puzzle me."

"Cliff didn't come in, did he?" asked Slim.

Dad Parker shook his head.

"He prob'ly don't know we had a hold-up," grinned Slim. "He pulled out about an hour too soon."

"Did he?" The old man squinted thoughtfully at the backbar. "What time was the hold-up, Slim?"

"About four o'clock."

"Vint Roche missed it, too," offered Sufferin'. "He left ahead of Cliff. Vint was ahead of the game, but Cliff had his reg'lar luck. If Vint had stayed the Trey of Spades would have been a couple hundred better off."

"Here's the lemonade," grinned the bartender. "Them lemons has been here a year or so, but I s'pose they're all right."

"Thanks," muttered the old man. He was more interested in wondering where Cliff had been from three o'clock in the morning until about eleven.

"Didja hear about our church?" asked Sufferin'.

"What church?" queried Buck.

"The old Chuck-Luck saloon is to be reformed," laughed Slim. "Lot of the old jiggers around here was tryin' to take up a collection to build a church; so I—yeah, they came to me first. They always come to a saloon to get money to build a church—so I thought I'd get off cheaper by lettin' 'em have the old saloon building.

"They're fixin' it up. I let 'em have some chairs and donated enough to buy song books. That preacher Jones ain't such a bad sort of a jigger. He lets my soul alone. He wanted to make a deacon out of me." Slim laughed. "I offered to put in a roulette wheel and give him a percentage. We're still deadlocked on our trade."

"What denomination is he?" asked Hashknife.

"What does that mean?" queried Sufferin'.

"Is he Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, or what?"

"I dunno," said Sufferin' seriously. "He packs a Bible, if that's anythin' to go on."

"And he sure can read it," declared "Hunky" Smith. "I heard him rasslin' with it over at the Box M. They had quite a meetin' over there. Jimmy Delaney sung a song. By golly, that feller sure can sing. He married old Flint Moore's daughter, yuh know."

"The minister is all right," said Dad Parker softly. "We need him in the Thunder range. I'm glad we're goin' to have a church in Oxbow, Slim. A little Gospel won't hurt any of us."

"A little won't," admitted Sufferin'. "It's like delirium tremens, Dad. A little shot of it will make yuh look at things different; but too much is plumb liable to collywobble yuh."

"Where did you get that idea, Sufferin'?" asked Dad.

"From my Pa." Sufferin's nose twitched violently. "Pa was a good man, I'd have yuh know. When he drank whisky he kept two distilleries workin' nights; when he fought, he never knowed when he was licked; and when he got religion, he got all there was. And when he died—" Sufferin' wiped away a tear—"they found a Bible inside his shirt-front. There was three bullets stickin' into that Bible."

"Was he in the war?" asked Hunky.

"A private one," nodded Sufferin'. "It was him agin' three deputy sheriffs and a U. S. marshal. Yuh see, Pa was always tryin' things out. He didn't believe everythin' he heard or read.

"He wanted to prove things for himself. A preacher told him that anybody would suffer if they broke the Ten Commandments. Pa wanted to be sure about this; so he picked out the eighth one and broke it all to thunder. From the looks of Pa when they brought him in, the preacher had the right hunch."

Sufferin' was so serious that his listeners did not smile, although several of them, including Hashknife and Sleepy, had very moist eyes and aching belt-lines.

Hashknife, Sleepy and Dad Parker crossed to the store and made their purchases. There was no sign of Blackie Dahl. The old man was very thoughtful on the way back to the ranch.

"Blackie is a bad man," he told them. "It seems that he has pretty much had his own way, and this incident is not going to

set well on his mind. Just be as careful as you can."

"Dontcha worry about him," smiled Hashknife. "He won't be so cocky next time. Shootin' that six-gun out of his hand made us kinda ace-high with him." Hashknife turned and looked at Sleepy. "Just where did yuh aim to hit him, Sleepy?"

"Somewhere between the belt and the chin," chuckled Sleepy. "I come dang near pullin' what yuh call a 'fox pass.' I'm like Buck—I'm shootin' low."

"Do you mean to say that you did not deliberately shoot that gun out of his hand?" demanded Dad Parker.

"Give me more credit than that," laughed Sleepy. "There wasn't no time for fancy work. I aimed to cut him off about at the lower vest-pocket. Any old time I shoot, yuh can bet all yore roll that I'm shootin' to kill."

"Blackie ain't noways slow on gettin' his gun," observed Hashknife. "I didn't look for him to do it, but yuh never can tell about his type. And he ain't exactly a coward. Peculiar sort of a jasper, I'd say. Didja notice the look he gave me when I kinda connected him with the Trey of Spades?"

"I did," nodded Sleepy. "He sure throwed a lot of hate into that look. Mebbe he is the Trey of Spades, at that."

"What kind of a feller is the sheriff?" asked Hashknife.

"Salt of the earth," replied Dad Parker. "Jud Farley is one white man. Buck Hardy is pretty much of a danged fool, but he's as honest as the day is long. They're both old timers in the Thunder country. Jud isn't what you'd call a thinkin' sheriff, but he tries as hard as the next man."

"Have you any idea who the Trey of Spades is?"

"Not the slightest. From his work, I would say that he is an experienced hand at the game. He has never made a false move yet. His hauls have not been big, but big enough to make folks uneasy. No, I do not think it is any one who belongs around here."

"Prob'ly don't," agreed Hashknife thoughtfully. "I sure hope not, anyway."

"Why do you say that, Hartley?"

"Cause it ain't nice to think of home folks runnin' their neck into a noose."

They rode on to the Maverick ranch, put up their horses and were shown their bunkhouse quarters by Harmony.

"Yuh won't have much chance to loaf around," informed Harmony. "Nothin' but work around here. Seems like I have it all to do, too. Some day I'm goin' to start right off across the hills and not quit runnin' 'till I git so —— far away from a cow ranch that all I'll ever see of a cow is a pitcher of one on a condensed milk can."

"Ain't this a good outfit to work for?" laughed Hashknife.

"Good? Is any of 'em good, I ask yuh? I s'pose that Dad Parker is as good as any to work for. It don't make much difference who yuh cook for. You've got a —— of a job anyway yuh look at it."

"Miss Parker helps yuh, don't she?"

"Milly? Help? Yeah." Harmony spat dryly and turned to the door. "She makes doughnuts. Vincent Roche likes doughnuts. I'll be —— if I'd make 'em for him."

"Well," laughed Hashknife, "I think we're goin' to like it around here. It's quiet, harmless and the food is fair."

"Fair, eh? Quiet, harmless, ——! Say, how did you fellers happen to come along and land jobs here?"

"Just happened." Hashknife stretched out on a bunk and squinted up at the ceiling.

"Uh-huh. I heard Cliff talkin' to Milly after yuh left. He kinda opined that mebbe yuh was sent in here."

"Sent in here? What for, Harmony?"

"Well, the sheriff ain't been able to catch the Trey of Spades."

Hashknife laughed and shook his head violently.

"Nothin' like that, Harmony. We're just a pair of driftin' cowpunchers, tha'sall. The Trey of Spades don't bother us, and as long as he lets us alone, we'll let him alone."

"I wan't tryin' to pump yuh," reminded Harmony.

"You got any idea who he is?" asked Sleepy.

"Prob'ly." Harmony grinned and hitched up his belt. "I mostly always do have an idea on things—wrong ideas. If I ever do hit it right I'll quit cookin' and buy me a tin star. I seen in a magazine where I can become a detective for a dollar and six-bits, includin' star. All I've got to have is a gun and a clever mind."

"Yuh could buy a second-hand gun," grinned Sleepy.

"That'd make me mechanically perfect," sighed Harmony. "But I'd still be a —— of a good cook."

FOR the next few days Hashknife and Sleepy were busy. The home corrals were in a bad state of repair and the line fences had been neglected for months. Dad Parker gave them a free hand. Cliff gave them no assistance. In fact he spent little time at the ranch, and it was hinted that Cliff was "stuck" on a dance-hall girl in Oxbow, who was known as the "Countess."

"And if that ain't ——, I'll eat m' shirt," declared Harmony confidentially. "Cliff's fi-nan-seer is comin' to visit the ranch in a few days. She's a dinger of a girl, too. Name's Dorothy Clement.

"She was here last summer for a couple months. Her and Milly used to go to school together. Cliff got stuck on her last summer and Milly told me that they was goin' to git married this fall. That's why Dad helped Cliff to git a start. Done him a —— of a lot of good, didn't it? Blowed in everythin' he owned, and now he's stuck on a dance-hall skirt. Life's a —— of a queer deal, any old way yuh look at it."

"We're all queer," declared Hashknife.

"Well, I run kinda true to form," stated Harmony seriously. "I'm a —— fool all the time."

"Yo're just a human bein'," laughed Hashknife. "Mebbe yo're a little more human than some of 'em, Harmony. What kind of a feller is this Vincent Roche?"

"That's a question, Hartley. Vint is a wild ridin', high-rollin' sort of a jigger. The Diamond V ain't makin' no money, but Vint is sure spendin' a-plenty. His dad left the ranch to him, and he's made a monkey out of it.

"I'm plumb scared to death that Milly is goin' to marry him. He's one of them doughnut eaters and wears plenty of vi'let perfume. But don'tcha ever get the idea that Vint ain't hard-boiled. Cliff was all right until he got to trailin' with Vint. 'Course he wasn't no mamma's angel child before—but tryin' to keep up with Vint—" Harmony shook his head sadly. "Well, Cliff is seven kinds of a —— fool, tha'sall."

"I ain't seen the preacher around here since Cliff bawled him out," observed Sleepy.

"Aw, that egg!" Harmony's nose wrinkled disgustedly. "He's stuck on Milly, too. I've seen that comin' on for quite a while, but it wasn't none of my business. He may go to heaven when he dies, but he won't git far on this earth."

"Do you know Blackie Dahl?" asked Hashknife.

"Yuh danged right! He's a tough jigger, Blackie is. Dad told me what happened down at the Cheyenne, and I can say that you was plumb lucky. Blackie's sudden, y'betcha. And you take my advice—look out fer him."

Hashknife promised that they would follow his advice, and started for the bunkhouse when Mildred called to them from the front porch. Dad had just come in with the mail, but was not with her.

"Somethin' we can do, ma'am?" asked Hashknife.

"Come and sit down here on the porch," said Mildred, and they accepted her invitation. She had a letter in her hand which she had been reading, and there was a worried expression on her face. She hesitated about opening the conversation.

"I just had a letter." She indicated the one she held. "Dad just brought it from Oxbow, and it is from the girl that Cliff is engaged to marry. She is coming here to spend a month—and Cliff is in town, drunk. Dad tried to get him to come home, but it was no use.

"Dorothy Clements—that is her name—will arrive in Oxbow about five o'clock today, and she expects Cliff to meet her at the train. She thinks that Cliff is an angel."

Mildred got to her feet and walked to the edge of the porch with the letter clutched tightly in both hands.

"Oh, it is just too bad! Dorothy is a lovely girl. I can't bear to tell her what has happened to Cliff—but she will have to know. Dad is all broke up over it. Cliff is killing Dad by inches, but Dad says nothing."

"Yeah, it sure is too bad," agreed Hashknife softly. "But it might all come out in the wash, ma'am. Do yuh want us to go down and bring her in from Oxbow?"

"Would you?" Quickly. "Dad and I could go, but there is too much danger of us running into Cliff. You know what he is like when he is drunk. He would be sure to suspect that Dorothy was coming in tonight, because he knows that she is coming soon."

"Won't it look kinda queer to her to not see any of the family there to meet her?"

"Yes, I suppose it will. But I—I——"

"You go along with us," suggested Hashknife. "We can give Cliff a bum steer. Leave it to me and Sleepy, will yuh, ma'am?"

"Yes, I will, mister," mimicking Hashknife's expression. "Why don't you call me Milly, like every one else does? I hate to be called 'ma'am.' I won't mind calling you Hashknife and Sleepy. Harmony told me that you were a couple of non-pa-reels. I don't know what he meant, but it was quite a lot for Harmony to say about any one."

Hashknife and Sleepy laughed as they got to their feet.

"All right, Milly," said Hashknife seriously. "The carriage will be ready any old time yuh say. We'll hitch that roan team to the spring-wagon, and I'll betcha Miss Dorothy won't miss anybody until she gets her breath back agin'."

"All right, Hashknife. Better put in some robes, because it will be cool riding home."

An hour later they drove the half-wild team up to the front of the house, and Sleepy swung to their bits until Mildred was into the seat. Then he swung them around and managed to climb into the rear of the wagon as Hashknife drove them through the gate on the run, swinging into the main road on two wheels, and heading for Oxbow in a cloud of dust.

CLIFF PARKER'S future had assumed an indigo tint. There was a sour taste of liquor in his mouth, as he leaned against the Cheyenne bar and considered everything in general. The aproned bartender was openly sympathetic and also philosophic.

"They're all alike," he told Cliff. "The Countess wasn't no exception, son. She accepted your money, loved yuh accordin'ly and then transferred her attentions. I dunno what she can see about Blackie Dahl—but wimmin are queer cattle. Aw, cheer up, Cliff. There's lots of wimmin'. I've been in love lotsa times."

"Oh, go to ——!" groaned Cliff.

"Hit hard," observed the bartender to himself, and then to Cliff: "Why don'tcha go home and sober up? You've been drunk for a week. Next thing yuh know you'll be seein' little red devils with green hats and goggle-eyes. Grab on to yourself."

Cliff shoved away from the bar, spat viciously and searched his pockets for tobacco and cigaret papers.

"You hadn't ought to hold no bad feelin's toward Blackie." Thus the bartender thoughtfully. "He never took her away from yuh—she just went."

"Yeah, she just went," nodded Cliff dryly. "She's straight as a string, but she didn't play square. I don't *sabe* her. She don't drink, smoke nor swear."

"But she sure can sing," said the bartender. "That's all Slim hired her for. By golly, she sure don't have nothin' to do with anybody, unless she wants to. Next thing we know she'll be snaggin' the preacher. Ha, ha, ha! I wouldn't put it past her."

"Aw, shut up!" Cliff resented this accusation. He hated the minister.

"She's over in the Rodeo restaurant, eatin' with Blackie," continued the bartender. "Prob'ly fried oysters." That was the bartender's idea of something out of the ordinary.

Cliff walked outside and leaned against the doorway. It had been an effort for him to keep his hands off the loquacious bartender. He realized for the first time that he was making a fool of himself, bringing disgrace upon his father and sister.

It seemed weeks since he had been home and he wondered, in a detached sort of a way, if every one was all right. His mouth was dry and his throat ached.

"I'm in awful shape," he told himself. "Kinda jiggly all over. I wonder if that bartender—aw, to —— with the red devils!"

He squinted across the street at the Rodeo restaurant. What was it the bartender had said, he wondered? Wasn't it something about fried oysters?

"When did I eat last?" he asked himself. He couldn't remember.

Then he swung away from the building and crossed the street toward the restaurant. As he stepped up on the wooden sidewalk the Countess came out, followed by Blackie Dahl.

The Countess was not of the approved type of dance-hall girl. She was slightly above medium height, slender, graceful. Her face was well modeled, and chemicals had had nothing to do with the tinting of her dark auburn hair.

She was well dressed, with none of the artificial colors and bangles of the honka-tonk, and there were no lines of dissipation in her creamy complexion. There was a half-smile on her lips, as she listened to Blackie Dahl who was shutting the door behind them.

Cliff glanced at her, in a detached sort of a way, and almost bumped into Blackie, who tried to step around Cliff to join her. But he did not watch his step, and stumbled over Cliff's foot, taking a header square into a porch post.

He threw out both hands to save himself, but his head hit the post a resounding whack. An ordinary man would have been knocked unconscious, but Blackie Dahl was no ordinary man—so far as thickness of skull was concerned.

He swore dazedly, got to his feet quickly, and, with only one instinct left—to walk—he strode boldly into a hitch-rack, a few feet away, and was knocked flat on his back.

The Countess did not look at Cliff, who leaned against the café door and gazed seriously upon Blackie's acrobatics, but there were tears on her cheeks, as she started across the street alone.

Blackie managed to get to his feet, but he was too dazed to understand what had happened to him. He could see the Countess going away from him; so he followed her, or as near as he could, with his erratic course.

"If he was tryin' to entertain her, he's loco," declared Cliff to himself. "She didn't even wait to see if he got up."

Then he turned and went into the restaurant.

Five miles of dirt road had taken most of the ambition out of the roan team, and they were willing to stop at a side-street hitch-rack. Hashknife and Sleepy went to the depot with Mildred, where they found that the train was several hours late.

"Isn't that bad luck!" exclaimed Mildred impatiently. "If we stay here very long, Cliff will surely find us or see that team."

"Don't yuh worry about that," grinned Hashknife. "We'll take care of Cliff for yuh."

The depot agent came back to the window and looked out at them. He had been in charge of the Oxbow station for years and knew every one.

"Miss Parker, why don'tcha go upstairs and visit with my wife until train time?" he asked. "She don't have a lot of company, and she'll be tickled to have you. Supper is almost ready, I think."

"Oh, that would be just lovely," agreed Mildred.

"You bet it would," agreed the agent, laughing. "Come on and I'll go up with you."

"That's sure a swell idea," grinned Hashknife, patting her on the shoulder. "You go ahead and don't worry about anythin'. Me and Sleepy will be here when the train comes."

They left the depot and walked up the street to the Cheyenne, where they ran into Blackie Dahl. Blackie was cold sober, and one of his eyes had assumed a purple shade. He merely nodded to them and walked away. The bartender grinned covertly and set out the glasses.

"I dunno who done it to him, but I think it was Cliff Parker."

"What did they fight over?" grinned Hashknife.

"Mebbe it was the Countess, I dunno. Cliff left here and I think he went over to the Rodeo restaurant, where Blackie and the Countess was eatin' oysters, prob'ly. Anyway, it was only a little while until the Countess comes in and goes back toward the dance-hall, with Blackie trailin' her. He's sure owl-eyed."

"Where is Cliff now?" asked Hashknife.

"Gosh, I dunno."

"Is he drunk?"

"Not so very. He's kinda got a hang-over. If he don't brace up he's goin' to see things, don'tcha know it? A young feller like him can't gurgle hooch forever without annexin' a few queer animals. But he ain't the kind yuh can advise. Have another on the house—the boss ain't here."

They accepted the invitation and strolled around the place. The Cheyenne was quite an institution. The bar-room was about fifty feet long by twenty-five feet wide, adjoining the gambling room, which was of the same proportions, with a wide, arched doorway connecting the two rooms. At the rear was the dance-hall, which was about fifty by thirty, with a small stage built across the right-hand end. Wide doorways opened from both the bar-room and the gambling room.

The appointments were not elegant, but they were substantial. Slim Cole drew the

business of Thunder range, and his games were on the square. Over the bar was this caption:

WE ARE NOT IN THIS BUSINESS FOR YOUR HEALTH

And in a huge frame in the gambling room was this statement:

YOUR HOME AND BUSINESS FIRST
We don't Want Money with Tear Drops on its Trail

"Slim Cole is honest, anyway," mused Hashknife, as they looked at the framed warning. "'Tear drops on its trail.' By golly, there's a lot of it, Sleepy."

Some one was playing the piano in the dance-hall, and as they strolled over there a woman began singing. They halted in the big doorway and listened. It was the Countess. A lanky, pasty-faced young man was at the piano, playing her accompaniment.

"She can sing," muttered Hashknife. "That ain't no honkatonk voice, Sleepy."

Slim Cole had come through the gambling room and halted beside them.

"That's the Countess," he said softly. "Her stuff is too danged good for these half-drunk punchers. The rest of the girls just whoop or screech their songs, and they make a big hit."

"She's pretty, too," declared Sleepy.

"Yeah, she sure is," grinned Slim. "But don't never get the idea that she's anythin' but a singer."

"She kinda hooked Cliff Parker, didn't she?" queried Hashknife.

"He blew a lot of money on her, if that means anythin'. She keeps 'em off at arm-length and they blow all their money on her. Of course," Slim grinned, "she's an asset to my business, even if she does call me Mister Cole."

"I s'pose," said Hashknife softly. "Listen!"

The piano was playing softly, and the clear contralto voice was lifted in an old love song, "The Sweetest Story Ever Told."

The place was silent now, except for the soft voice of the singer.

> "Tell me that you love me.
> Whisper softly, sweetly, as of old.
> Tell me that you love me,
> For that's the sweetest story ever told."

The singer's voice died away. Again came the whirr of the roulette wheel, the soft clatter of poker-chips. Hashknife and Sleepy turned away and walked back toward the bar with Slim Cole.

"When it comes to women—I pass," said Hashknife softly. "That one has the voice of an angel. I'm kinda hard-boiled myself, but she had me takin' a deep breath. She's broke Cliff Parker and a lot more, I reckon. A gold digger with a voice of gold. A honkatonk singer, when she might be —— well, anythin'."

"Yore loop's draggin'," warned Sleepy softly.

"Yeah, that's a fact," admitted Hashknife, and Slim laughed.

"I reckon a woman wouldn't fool you much, Hartley."

"One of 'em fooled Adam," smiled Hashknife. "I don't know anythin' about 'em, Slim. Mebbe I'd be the biggest fool in the world—if I tried to find out somethin' about 'em."

"Everybody is," said Sleepy quickly. "The best thing to do is to forget 'em. That's what I've always done."

"It's a good idea, I suppose," agreed Hashknife. "But the good God made us rational critters, and why shouldn't we hanker for a mate at times. Why even the birds——"

"I'll remind yuh of this," interrupted Sleepy seriously. "Next time you tell me that my loop is draggin', I'll speak my little piece about the birdies."

They laughed and moved to the bar, but Hashknife's face was serious. Slim Cole noticed it with amusement.

"I'll tell yuh what I'll do," he suggested softly. "I'll take yuh back and introduce yuh to her Hartley."

"And he'll leave his money with me when he does," declared Sleepy quickly.

Hashknife shook his head.

"No, thanks, Slim. It ain't that serious. Have yuh seen Cliff Parker lately?"

"Not for quite a while. Mebbe he went home."

"That might be," nodded Hashknife. "We'll take a look around town."

They crossed to the Rodeo restaurant and sat down at a table. It was growing dark and the lamps had already been lighted. They asked the waiter if he had seen Cliff Parker, and he took the question under advisement.

"Yeah, he was here just a while ago. I served him with a meal, but he didn't eat

all of it. I'm not sure, but I think he went out the back door."

"Was he drunk?"

"No-o-o, I don't think so. He acted sober enough."

They finished their meal and went out again. It was half an hour before the train would be in.

"We'll take another look around the Cheyenne," said Hashknife. "If we don't find him there, he's likely gone back to the ranch."

Before they reached the door they ran into Jud Farley and Buck Hardy.

"Well, how's the Maverick ranch?" asked Farley, shaking hands with them.

"Fine," laughed Hashknife. "We haven't had time to vent many brands yet, but the year is young. How's crime?"

"Kinda slow. Goin' in?"

They started in through the doorway, when there came the unmistakable sound of a shot, or an explosion. It was muffled, like a shot fired inside a building, but there was nothing to show them its location.

"That sure sounded like a shot," said Farley anxiously. "Where did it seem to come from?"

"That's kinda hard to tell," replied Hashknife, walking back into the street.

To the left of the Rodeo restaurant was a general store, a vacant building, and next to that was a small jewelry store, in which a single oil-lamp gave a poor illumination. It was after closing hours.

Suddenly a man came out of the jewelry store, slammed the door shut behind him and came running across the street. It was the proprietor, a little, fat man, with gray hair and spectacles.

He was so short of breath that he was unable to speak for several seconds. Then he panted:

"I've been robbed!"

"Robbed?" blurted Farley. "Held-up, yuh mean?"

"Yes, yes! He came in the back door, with a mask on his face. I—I was alone—putting my jewelry into the safe. He held me up and took it all with him. Diamonds——"

"Wait a minute," begged Farley. "What did he look like, Mr. Freeland?"

"Look like? I don't know. Ju-just a man, with a mask on his face and a gun in his hand."

"And he took a shot at yuh, did he?"

"No, he didn't shoot."

"There was a shot fired."

"Tha-that was me. I—I have a shotgun under the counter. As he shut the door, I grasped this gun and fired both barrels at the door, just as it was closing."

"Think yuh hit him?"

"No, I—I don't know."

"Loaded with buckshot?" asked Hashknife.

"No, it wasn't buckshot; it was bird-shot."

"Was you expecting to be held up by a duck?"

"Probably had a horse out back of the store," said Farley quickly. "Our horses are here at the rack; so we'll just see if we can cut his trail. C'mon, Buck."

They raced for the hitch-rack, mounted and went pounding away in opposite directions, circling that side of the town, while Hashknife and Sleepy went back to the store with the excited owner.

"He was slick," explained the old man. "Not much talk. Just scooped up everything into his pockets."

"Here's his callin' card," observed Hashknife, picking it off a show-case and handing it to Freeland. "It's the Trey of Spades' trade-mark."

"And they won't get him," wailed the jeweler. "He's too slick for anything. See where I shot at the door?"

They went back and examined the jeweler's marksmanship. The two loads of bird-shot had plentifully sprinkled the door, but the distance was too great for it to have injured the bandit to any extent, even if part of the pattern had struck him.

"Small shot don't do very well in a sawed-off gun," observed Hashknife, as the jeweler exhibited his weapon. "You ought to use buckshot, pardner."

"I should have kept that back door locked."

"Nailed," said Sleepy. "Very few robbers carry claw-hammers."

"Let's take a little look around, Sleepy," suggested Hashknife, and they went out the back door, leaving the jeweler to try and figure out just how much he had lost.

It was quite dark out there and the ground was strewn with the usual litter found at the rear of business houses in small towns; broken boxes, odd pieces of lumber, tin cans. To the right was a low, tight-board fence, which enclosed the rear of the vacant building.

Hashknife scratched a match and cupped it in his palms for a more direct illumination, and as he glanced down at the litter-strewn ground, he whistled softly.

"Come here, Sleepy!" he called softly, as he scratched another match.

Together they bent down, picking up a miscellaneous assortment of jewelry, which seemed to have been strewn broadcast.

"By golly!" exclaimed Sleepy. "He sure must 'a' been scared to lose all this."

A groan echoed Sleepy's exclamation, and they both sprang to their feet. With a couple of long strides Hashknife reached the fence and knelt down again.

"Light another match, Sleepy. Here's a wounded man."

Sleepy scratched the match and they looked down into the pale face of Cliff Parker. There was an open cut above his temple which was bleeding freely, and several more tiny spots of blood on his face. The match burned out in Sleepy's fingers, and he swore softly.

Another match was lighted. A few feet from where Cliff lay was the black mask, lying where it had fallen or been thrown.

"There's the Trey of Spades, Hashknife," said Sleepy sadly. "The deadwood is upon him, that's a cinch."

"Yeah, that's so," agreed Hashknife. "He got some of the shot in his face, too. He probably got stung and dropped some of his loot, and it kinda looks like he ran into the fence and busted his head. A fine finish, Sleepy."

"Fine for old Dad and Milly."

Hashknife lifted his head and listened closely. From far away came the sound of a locomotive whistle. He sprang to his feet and grasped Sleepy by the arm.

"You beat it for the depot, Sleepy. Milly won't think anythin' of havin' to walk back to the wagon. She won't even ask were I am, 'cause she'll think I'm tryin' to keep Cliff from findin' out anythin'; *sabe?*"

"But what—" began Sleepy.

"Never mind about this end of it, Sleepy. You better rattle yore hocks, cowboy."

SLEEPY grunted softly and circled the store. He knew that Hashknife would do the best thing in regard to Cliff Parker. There was no question in his mind that Cliff Parker was the Trey of Spades, and his heart sank when he though what it would mean to Dad Parker and Milly.

About midway between the store and the depot he ran into Blackie Dahl, standing in front of a store, but neither of them spoke. Milly had come downstairs and was standing on the depot platform, talking to a man who turned out to be the minister. He spoke to Sleepy, who was panting from his hurried trip. The headlight of the train was already in sight, and they moved back as it approached.

As the train drew to a stop, Milly ran to a car platform and threw her arms around a girl, who was coming down with the assistance of the conductor. Sleepy kept in the background while the two girls finished their greeting, and then secured Miss Clement's two valises.

"Sleepy, I want you to meet Miss Clement," said Milly. "Dorothy, this is Mr. Stevens, known as Sleepy."

"I'm sure pleased to meet yuh," grinned Sleepy, as they shook hands. "How's all yore folks?"

"Where is Cliff?" Miss Clement ignored Sleepy's question.

"Oh, Cliff's out on the range," said Milly quickly. "You see, he didn't know you were to arrive today. He was gone when your last letter reached us, Dorothy."

"Oh, I'm sorry. It just seems ages and ages since I saw him."

"Well, it won't be long," assured Milly. "I know he will be greatly put out when he finds out that you arrived when he was away."

"Put out is just what he will be, that's a cinch," said Sleepy to himself. "He was sure 'out' when she arrived."

"We'll walk to the wagon," said Sleepy, leading the way. "We was kinda afraid to bring that team up here near the train."

"That's all right," said Milly. "It is such a short distance."

They found Hashknife sitting on the driver's seat, but he sprang down at their approach and shook hands with Miss Clement. The two girls occupied the rear seat, and had little chance for conversation on the way to the ranch as the team was inclined to make the greatest possible speed, and Hashknife made little effort to slow them down.

Dad Parker and Harmony met them at the porch and escorted the visitor inside,

while Hashknife and Sleepy drove down to the stable and unhooked the team.

"What did yuh do with Cliff?" asked Sleepy anxiously.

Hashknife did not reply. They stabled the horses and came back to the wagon, where Hashknife lifted off the rear seat and climbed into the wagon.

"We'll slide him out the end, Sleepy. We've got to get him into the bunkhouse before anybody sees us."

"You mean to say——"

"Sure. He's all wrapped up in robes, and I reckon them two girls had their feet on him all the way back."

Together they lifted out the robe-wrapped bundle and carried it into the bunkhouse. Hashknife lighted the lamp and they proceeded to remove the robes, disclosing Cliff Parker, with his arms and legs tied and a gag in his mouth. He stared at them, but without recognition.

"I had to make a mummy of him," explained Hashknife, "so I took a tie-rope. I gagged him, too."

They removed the ropes, and Hashknife was just starting to investigate the knots in the handkerchief gag, when the door opened and in came Dad Parker. Hashknife groaned softly and stepped aside, while the old man stared at Cliff wonderingly.

He came slowly forward, looking down at his son's bloody face. His eyes shifted to the loose ropes and he looked at Hashknife, as if begging for an explanation.

"It's kinda hard luck, Dad," said Hashknife slowly. "We was tryin' to fix him up and put him to bed before yuh had a chance to see him."

"But what does it all mean?" asked Dad hoarsely. "Why is my son in this condition? Why was he bound and gagged?"

Cliff was trying to sit up, and Hashknife swiftly removed the gag. He tried to get to his feet, but was unable to do so alone; so Sleepy helped him onto a bunk, where he flopped full-length.

"Won't either of you tell me what it means?" asked Dad.

"I'll tell yuh about it, Dad," offered Hashknife. "It ain't somethin' nice to tell a man about his son, but I reckon you've got to know it. It'll hurt to beat ——, old timer."

"I want to know about it, Hashknife."

"All right, Dad."

And in a few words Hashknife told him about the hold-up and of how they had found Cliff with loose jewelry scattered all around him. He told just why he had bound and gagged Cliff, and how they had brought him home without any one suspecting that they had even discovered a clew to the bandit.

"And this means that Cliff is the Trey of Spades?" Dad's voice broke badly. "Is that it, Hashknife?"

"It sure looks thataway, Dad. Any jury on earth would convict him in a minute."

The old man bowed his head for several moments, his gnarled hands clutching at his knees. Then he looked up, shaking his head.

"I—I was afraid of this," he faltered. "The morning that the Cheyenne was held up, Cliff left there at three o'clock. He did not get here until about eleven. What is there left to do, except to turn him over to the sheriff?"

"Think it over quite a lot," replied Hashknife slowly. "We'll have to let Harmony in on it, I reckon. Sleepy will go up there and get some hot water and rags. We'll prob'ly have to find some tweezers and a razor, 'cause we've got to get them shot out of his face. Mebbe Harmony's got what we need, Sleepy."

Cliff made no objections to having Hashknife remove his clothes and put him to bed. He was in a dazed condition, but did not seem to be suffering greatly.

Dad picked up his soiled coat and felt in a pocket. His hand came out, holding a jewel case, which he opened under the light of the lamp. It contained a string of imitation pearls, which would cost about fifty dollars.

Hashknife squinted at them thoughtfully.

"Hide 'em, Dad," he advised. "They're evidence against him."

"I've never broken the law yet," said Dad firmly.

"All right," Hashknife reached over and took the case. "You won't be breakin' any law by keepin' your mouth shut, will yuh?"

"No, I—I suppose not. But you can't evade——"

"It has been done," interrupted Hashknife. "Do you realize what this means, Dad? Do you know what it would mean for Milly?"

Before the old man could reply, Sleepy and Harmony came in, carrying a kettle of hot water, some rags and a towel. Sleepy had told Harmony part of the story, or at least enough to keep him from asking too many questions.

"Harmony had some tweezers," said Sleepy, "and there's a razor here. We brought some of that stickum-tape, too."

With the able assistance of Sleepy, Hashknife managed to clean out Cliff's wound, bind it up; and by dint of perseverance he succeeded in taking the six bird-shot out of his cheeks and forehead. Several more that left scratches, which would soon heal.

The pain of the crude surgery had revived Cliff, who looked at them wonderingly.

"What in —— is goin' on around here?" he muttered, trying to sit up.

"Better stay where yuh are, Cliff," advised Harmony.

"Huh?" Cliff felt of his bandaged head. "Must have got hit, eh? How did I get home?"

"You try sleepin' for a while," advised Hashknife. "In the mornin' we'll answer questions."

He slumped back on his pillow, squinting painfully at the ceiling. Dad Parker turned wearily to the door and Hashknife walked out with him.

"Don't worry about this, Dad," he advised. "Let me and Sleepy handle it for yuh. If we can keep Cliff under cover for a few days he'll be as good as new. Nobody suspects him, don'tcha see?"

"I see," Dad Parker sighed deeply, turned and went slowly to the house.

Hashknife watched him enter the house. Silhouetted against one of the windows were the two girls, talking, Their shadows turned away at the entrance of the old man. Overhead a star-jeweled sky lighted up the hills, and on the jagged top of the Thunder range, a silvery crescent moon seemed to balance on one tip.

Hashknife breathed deeply and turned back to the bunk-house where he found Harmony and Sleepy talking softly. Cliff was asleep.

"You fellers take care of him," said Hashknife softly. "I'm goin' back to town and see what the sheriff found out."

He picked up his hat and turned to the door.

"Why, even the birds—" Thus Sleepy indifferently.

Hashknife squinted at him, and a grin flashed across his lips.

"Yeah, even the little birds, Sleepy."

He shut the door softly behind him and went to the stable, where he saddled his horse and rode swiftly away toward town. He had no clear conception of just how he was going to keep Cliff under cover until his face was healed. Hashknife was not in the habit of trying to defeat justice; rather he had upheld the law during most of his career.

"The Trey of Spades will disappear, it will be a lesson to Cliff, and everybody will be happy—I hope," he told himself.

He found the sheriff at his office, talking with Buck and the jeweler. Their ride had been in vain.

"We wondered what had become of you, Hartley," said Farley.

Hashknife told them of the arrival of Miss Clement, and that he had hurried as fast as possible to get back to town.

"Well, he made a clean getaway," declared Farley gloomily.

"We went out through the back and all around," said Hashknife, "but naturally he wouldn't be there."

"Not likely," agreed Farley, and Hashknife felt sure that they had not discovered the scattered jewelry.

"You fellers were lookin' for Cliff, wasn't yuh?" asked Buck, and Hashknife felt that there was a hidden meaning in the question.

"Yeah," said Hashknife easily. "He was home when we got there. Harmony said he came a little while after we left."

"Drunk?" queried Buck.

"As a goat," nodded Hashknife. leaving it to their imagination as to how drunk a goat might get.

"Well," concluded Farley, "there's no use huntin' in the dark; so we might as well close up the place."

Hashknife drifted over to the Cheyenne and mingled with the crowd. There was a fairly heavy play, and a number of couples were dancing. On the far side of the room, the Countess and Blackie Dahl were sitting at a table. She seemed greatly interested in what he was saying, although Hashknife could see that he was maudlin drunk.

As the dance finished she left Blackie and went to the platform. Slim Cole walked in beside Hashknife and took him by the arm.

"Back again, eh?" he laughed. "They

sure do come back. When she finishes her song I'll introduce yuh. Stay here, where I can find yuh before she gets back to Blackie. He's as jealous as ——"

Hashknife grinned and nodded. Vincent Roche passed him and went up close to the platform, but the Countess merely glanced at him, as she started her song, which was a music-hall ditty and not at all what Hashknife wanted to hear her sing.

As she came down off the platform, Slim Cole hurried him across to her before she could reach Blackie's table.

"Countess, I want yuh to meet Mr. Hartley," said Slim, grinning widely.

She looked keenly at Hashknife for a moment and held out her hand.

"I am very glad to meet you," she said slowly. "I noticed you in here today."

"I didn't s'pose yuh would," smiled Hashknife. "I sure did enjoy yore singin', but I didn't care much for yore last song."

She smiled softly.

"Do you like the old love songs, Mr. Hartley?"

"Love songs don't ever get old, do they?"

"No, I suppose not. You are a stranger in Oxbow?"

"Yeah, we've only been here a little while. We're workin' at the Maverick ranch—Parker's place."

"Oh, I see." She looked away.

"You've been here long, ma'am?"

"Almost a month."

"Well, I hope to see yuh agin', ma'am."

"Thank you—I hope so too."

She walked on to where Blackie sat glowering at Hashknife's back, as he crossed the hall and went into the barroom, where he found Slim Cole.

"How did yuh like her?" grinned Slim. "Ain't she a dinger.?"

"Very nice," admitted Hashknife. "And just for that, I'll buy a drink."

The jewel robbery had become generally known by this time and was the main topic of conversation.

"When did this Trey of Spades start operatin'," asked Hashknife.

"The first time was about four months ago, Hartley. In that length of time he has pulled off eight jobs. His first job was to stick up the Crow Creek stage out of Silverbend. The next one was to blow the post-office safe at Silverbend and grab a lot of registered mail. Since then he has robbed the Snake River Hill stage, out of Cottonwoods, the little bank at Cottonwoods, the store at Weston, the express office, Cheyenne saloon and now the jewelry store here in Oxbow."

"And he always left his card, eh?"

"Every time. Whoever he is, he's gettin' rich. It's a payin' proposition, as far as he's gone."

Several other men came up to the bar, engaging Slim in conversation, and Hashknife drifted away. He crossed the street and glanced in the Rodeo restaurant, where Jud Farley and Buck were eating their delayed supper. Then he circled the jewelry store and came in behind it, moving carefully. This time he did not light a match, but he did grunt delightedly as he found what he was looking for. Then he swung around behind the Rodeo, went back to the street and untied his horse.

He rode swiftly back over the moonlit road and stabled his horse. There was no lights showing in the ranch house, but he could see a dim light in the bunkhouse. Sleepy was in bed, reading an old magazine, while Cliff slept soundly in a bunk across the room.

"How's the little birds?" grinned Sleepy, tossing the magazine aside and reaching for his tobacco.

"They're fine, Sleepy," Hashknife sat down and began removing his boots. "The sheriff hasn't found that jewelry yet."

"Didja meet the Countess?"

"Yeah."

"Yeah?" Sleepy lighted his cigaret thoughtfully. "Well, I ain't no hand to chide a man as old as you are, Hashknife; but, personally, I think you're seven kinds of —— fool. You go plumb back there to meet a dance-hall female. And you ain't even ashamed of yourself, are yuh?"

"No-o-o-o, I can't say that I am, Sleepy."

"I'm ashamed for yuh, cowboy."

"Thanks, Sleepy. You sure are considerate."

Hashknife yawned, reached inside his shirt and drew out a flattened sombrero. He looked at it, looked around the place and threw it under the bunk. Sleepy leaned down and looked under the bunk, while Hashknife removed the rest of his clothes.

"What's the idea of the hat, Hashknife?" queried Sleepy.

"Cliff's hat," said Hashknife softly, as he blew out the lamp. "We forgot about it, Sleepy. I went back after it."

Hashknife crawled into bed and adjusted himself to a comfortable position.

"I apologize to the little birdies," said Sleepy meaningly.

"They accept it," drawled Hashknife, "but they're still singin' their little song."

DAD PARKER was up early the next morning. He had spent a sleepless night, trying to decide just what to do, but was no nearer a solution than he had been the night before. His mind was haunted by the picture of his son, lying on the bunkhouse floor, bound and gagged, with a white, blood-streaked face and dazed, wondering eyes.

Down in his heart he thanked Hashknife and Sleepy for doing what they had done to save Cliff from the law. There was no doubt in his mind that Cliff was the Trey of Spades, and he wondered just what restitution he could make and still save his son from the penitentiary.

He walked slowly around to the front of the house, where Dorothy Clement stood on the porch, gazing across the hills. She was a pretty little thing, with wide, wistful eyes that matched in color her soft blue morning gown. She smiled at Dad and indicated the hills with a sweep of her hand.

"I've been looking far back into the hills, Dad," she said slowly. "Milly said that Cliff might come this morning, and I wanted to be the first to see him."

The old man shaded his eyes and stared at the hills, with their rose-tinted crests and cool blue shadows in the morning light. Then he dropped his hand and looked up at her.

"I'll let you do the lookin', Dorothy," he told her wearily. "My old eyes ain't as good as they used to be."

He turned and started toward the rear of the house, when a joyful exclamation caused him to turn. Dorothy was looking down the road, where a lone rider was coming toward them.

"Oh, that must be Cliff!" exclaimed the girl. "Why doesn't he hurry?"

Dad squinted at the rider and his lips shut in a thin line. He had recognized the horse. Milly came out onto the porch and Dorothy threw one arm around her waist.

"Isn't that Cliff coming?" she asked.

Dad looked at Milly, who turned from a glance at the on-coming rider, and their eyes met. Neither of them spoke. The rider swung in at the gate and came slowly up to them. It was Jud Farley, the sheriff, riding his white-faced sorrel."

"Howdy, folks," the sheriff smiled as he drew up near the porch and dismounted.

"Good mornin', Jud," said Dad Parker. "Glad to see you."

Farley looked closely at Dorothy, and a wide grin wreathed his face.

"Well, by golly, if it ain't little Miss Clement!" he exclaimed. "Say, I'm sure glad to see yuh, little lady."

"And I am very glad to see you, Mr. Farley," smiled Dorothy, as they shook hands. "You haven't changed one bit."

"Well," Farley grinned at her, "you have. You're gettin' prettier every year."

Dorothy blushed, and this amused Farley greatly.

"Paints her own cheeks, too, by golly. Ho hum-m-m! I wish I was twenty years younger. Hartley told me somethin' about bein' at the train to meet somebody, but I was too busy to pay any attention to the name. You goin' to stay a while?"

"If they don't get tired of me."

"Tired of yuh? Say, you'll be here a long time," Farley laughed. "Suits me if yuh never go away. This country sure does need somethin' for sore eyes. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have you had breakfast?" asked Milly.

"Hm-m-m, kinda. I can always eat, though. You know me, Milly."

"I'll tell Harmony that you are here."

"Tell me what he says," laughed Farley. "It does us good to know what other folks think about us once in a while."

The two girls went into the house, and a moment later Hashknife came out of the bunk-house door and started toward the stable.

"I want to see Hartley," said Farley, and turned abruptly away from Dad Parker, following Hashknife. The old man looked after him, his heart filled with apprehension. Did it mean that the sheriff knew something of what had happened the night before, he wondered?

He knew that Farley would suspect something, if he saw Cliff in his present condition. Perhaps, he thought, Farley already had evidence against Cliff. He could see Hashknife at the stable door, waiting

for Farley to reach him. They stood there for a minute or two, talking, and then moved over by the corral, where they sat down on a pile of old poles.

Hashknife was a little puzzled at the early morning appearance of the sheriff. He tried to think of something they had overlooked; something that might be a clue for the sheriff to fasten the guilt upon Cliff.

"Out kinda early, ain't yuh?" asked Hashknife.

Farley smiled thoughtfully,

"Mebbe. Let's set down and talk a little."

They walked over by the corral and sat down on the pile of poles.

"We got back most of that jewelry," said Farley. "It was scattered around the yard back of that store."

"Tha'sso?" Hashknife feigned surprize.

"Yeah." Dryly.

"The jeweler was lucky, don'tcha think?"

"Uh-huh." Farley rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I wouldn't be surprized to know that some of the birdshot hit the Trey of Spades."

"It might, at that. A shotgun sure scatters a lot."

"Yeah. We found blood alongside that fence out there, and we found the mask he wore."

"Blood, eh? By golly, he must 'a' been hit."

"And," said Farley looking straight into Hashknife's eyes, "there was a little blood here and there. In fact we was able to foller the trail from there plumb around to the hitch rack beyond the old feed store."

Hashknife squinted thoughtfully,

"Is that so? Then he didn't leave town, eh?"

"Mebbe he did, and mebbe he didn't."

"Yeah, that might be true," Hashknife knew that Farley suspected that he knew more about it than he was willing to tell.

"He was there at the hitch rack quite a while," stated Farley. "There was more blood at that spot."

"Uh-huh. He prob'ly was quite badly hurt and it took him a little while to untie his horse."

"Mebbe," Farley smiled softly.

Milly and Dorothy came around the house, walking with an arm around each other. They stopped at the kitchen door and talked with Harmony.

"Awful nice little girl, that Clement girl," observed Farley.

"Finer than silk," agreed Hashknife softly. "She's goin' to marry Cliff Parker."

Farley glanced sharply at Hashknife.

"Yuh say she is?"

"It ain't a secret, Farley."

"Well," Farley frowned heavily, "it may not be a secret, but it's a —— shame."

"She thinks a lot of him, Farley."

"Um-m-m. Where's Cliff?"

"In Oxbow, I suppose. He spends most of his time there, don't he?"

"He was here last night, wasn't he?"

"Not when I got back. He said somethin' to Sleepy about goin' over to the Diamond V ranch. Him and Roche are good pals, I reckon."

"Over to the Diamond V, eh?"

Hashknife nodded quickly, but with a fear that Farley knew that he was lying. Came the musical jangling of Harmony's big steel triangle, calling them to breakfast, and Hashknife was very thankful for the interruption. As they started for the house, Sleepy came out of the bunkhouse and joined them.

Hashknife told him about the recovery of the jewelry, and Sleepy's surprize was almost overdone. At the doorway, Hashknife turned back.

"Got to have a coat," he grinned. "Plumb forgot that we have company. Be with yuh in a minute."

He hurried down to the bunkhouse and went inside. Cliff was sitting up in his bunk, feeling of his bandages. He scowled at Hashknife and waited for him to explain.

"Get into your clothes," ordered Hashknife. "You've been about all the different kinds of —— fools that there is runnin' loose, Parker; and you've got to work fast. Have you got a horse and saddle here?"

"What the —— are you talkin' about?" demanded Cliff.

"Somethin' about your future. Dorothy Clement is up at the house, waitin' for you to ride in out of the hills. The sheriff is also up there, kinda hankerin' for a chance to look yuh over. You spin into your clothes, grab a horse and saddle and slide into the hills.

"As soon as the sheriff rides away, you ride in; *sabe?* Don't ask a lot of fool questions! You ain't got a lot of time. Now start movin', while the time is right."

"Dorothy up there?" Cliff scowled as well as he could with his bandages.

"Came last night. We've lied all we could. Get goin'."

"And the sheriff, too, eh? What in —— does he want?"

"Listen," Hashknife stopped at the door, pulling on his coat, "you do as I say, Parker; unless you want to cool the soles of your boots on a penitentiary floor for the next ten or twenty years."

"Is that so?"

"Be a —— fool about this, and see if it ain't," replied Hashknife, shutting the door.

He went swiftly up to the house and took his place at the breakfast table. The atmosphere seemed a trifle tense, and the conversation strained. There was none of the usual goodnatured banter of a cow-ranch breakfast table. Farley noticed this.

"Kinda like a Quaker meetin'," he observed.

"Dorothy and I talked half the night," said Milly quickly. "We are all talked out."

Farley told them about the robbery in Oxbow and how he had found the stolen jewelry that morning.

"Oh, I think that the Trey of Spades is just too romantic!" exclaimed Dorothy. "He is like Robin Hood."

"He's romantic all right," grinned Farley. "I'll betcha he ain't so romantic this mornin', 'cause he got some of old man Freeland's birdshot in his anatomy. If I can find the man who is sufferin' from a duckload, I'll have the Trey of Spades."

"Well, I hope you don't find him," declared Dorothy.

"I'll do my best," smiled Farley, as he got up from the table. "I've sure earned him, little lady."

Hashknife and Sleepy walked outside with Farley, who mounted his horse.

"You goin' back to Oxbow?" asked Hashknife.

"I s'pose," Farley grinned thoughtfully. "I've got to kinda keep movin' and try to find the jigger that got hit with that shotgun. From the amount of blood he lost, I'm wonderin' if it all come from a few birdshot."

"Might 'a' pinched his hand in the door when he was goin' out," reflected Hashknife aloud.

"Oh, yeah," Farley's nose wrinkled in affected seriousness. "That could sure cut him up a lot. Well, I'll see yuh later."

They watched him ride away and turned back to the bunk-house. Cliff was not there. Dad Parker came down and Hashknife told him what he had ordered Cliff to do. The old man seemed to breathe a little easier, but was still dubious.

"Jud Farley suspects him," he declared. "Jud is no fool. He has some evidence against Cliff, that is a sure thing."

"All right, Dad." Hashknife slapped the old man on the shoulder. "Let him suspect. He ain't got enough evidence to make an arrest—or he'd make it. If we can keep Cliff under cover until his wounds heal, it'll be a cinch."

"Yes, we might evade the law, Hartley; but we can't evade our own knowledge. Milly knows—or suspects. She will have to know the truth."

"Yeah, you'll have to tell her, Dad."

"And what right have you two to help compound a felony? You know that my son is guilty. It is your duty to notify the sheriff—not to block justice."

Hashknife smiled softly and shook his head,

"Dad, do you read the Bible?"

"What has the Bible to do with this." Bitterly.

" 'Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.' Who are we to judge your son, Dad? Why should we send him to prison? Are we so danged much better than he is that we must see the law punish him?"

"You are law-abiding, aren't you, Hartley?"

"Perhaps. There are no sheriffs after us —now."

"You are breaking the law right now."

"Sure thing. And what is more, Dad, we always will—or until the law starts writin' in more 'do's' and less 'don'ts.' It is always a 'don't.' Me and Sleepy stay within the law—or as far as our conscience will allow."

"There comes Cliff," said Sleepy, who was near the door.

They looked out. Cliff was riding in at the front gate, bareheaded, bandaged. Dorothy and Milly had come out on the porch, and now they went running down to him. Cliff dismounted, as they reached him, and Dad Parker left the doorway, going toward them.

Hashknife and Sleepy went back into the bunkhouse and sat down.

"He never wore his hat," observed Sleepy. "I'll betcha he never seen it down there under the bunk."

"He's got a lot of lyin' to do now," grinned Hashknife. "I'd sure hate to be in his shoes. And he's got to lie before Dad and Milly, who know danged well he's lyin'. It sure is one swell situation."

"And it's none of our business," said Sleepy seriously. "We ain't got nothin' to do with it a-tall, Hashknife. There used to be a time when me and you would be hornin' into this here Trey of Spades thing —but that time has passed."

"Yeah, that's true," Hashknife sighed deeply and began rolling a cigaret. "I feel sorry for Dad and Milly. He's a dinger, Sleepy. Dad ain't makin' no —— of a fuss, but down deep in his heart it's hurtin'. Milly don't know it all yet. It'll kinda jar her, I reckon."

"And it'll jar Miss Clement, too, Hashknife."

"Oh, sure. She thinks that Cliff is a little tin god."

"Speakin' of tin gods," Sleepy tilted back on his bunk and squinted at the ceiling. "How about the Countess?"

"Kinda tinny," said Hashknife seriously.

"Hm-m-m. Didja see her ag'in?"

"Yeah—talked with her, Sleepy. She's a pretty danged nice sort of a girl—for her kind."

"For her kind," echoed Sleepy. "But yuh got to remember that Cliff turned thief to buy things for her."

"He did, like ——!" Hashknife fairly exploded.

"Well, dear me!" Sleepy sat up quickly. "He didn't?"

"No, Sleepy. The Trey of Spades was doin' a land-office business before she ever came to Oxbow. I found out how long she has been there."

"That's a different colored horse," grunted Sleepy.

HASHKNIFE cleared the table and began playing solitaire, while Sleepy watched him indifferently. It was about thirty minutes after Cliff's arrival at the house when he opened the door of the bunkhouse and came inside. The two cowboys waited for him to speak.

His face was slightly flushed and he had the appearance of a man who was badly in need of a stimulant.

"Well," he said hoarsely, looking at Hashknife, "what next?"

"Next what?" Hashknife shoved back from the table.

"Next order." He came closer and stared at Hashknife. "You seem to be runnin' things around here, Hartley."

There was a distinct threat in Cliff's attitude; so Hashknife got to his feet, leaning across the table.

"Don't be a fool, Parker," Hashknife spoke softly. "You've got past so far—now be careful."

"Yeah?" Cliff spat dryly, thoughtfully. "What's the big idea?"

"The big idea is to keep you out of the penitentiary. Mebbe you don't appreciate it, but yo're edgin' in pretty close to the big stone corral, young feller."

"The —— I am!" snorted Cliff angrily. "Let me tell you——"

The door opened behind him and Dad Parker came in. Cliff turned and looked at his father, who came up close to him, leaving the door open. The old man's eyes were stony cold and his jaw was set, as he faced his son.

"More trouble, eh?" said Cliff angrily.

"No, not trouble," Dad Parker shook his head. "It is just a show-down, Cliff. You told your story very well, and I think that Dorothy believes you, but I know better and I've told Milly the truth."

"Well," Cliff frowned heavily, "that's all right."

"All right with you, Cliff. Perhaps you will have time to get out of the country, if you don't waste too much time in starting. The sheriff is suspicious of you, and when he sees you his suspicions will be confirmed. These two men have saved you from the consequences of your crimes, but there is little that they can do now."

"Huh!" Cliff rubbed the back of his hand across his mouth and licked his dry lips. For several moments he stared at the floor, as though trying to concentrate his thoughts. Then he lifted his head and looked at his father.

"Dad," his voice broke slightly, "what in —— is this all about?"

"All about?" The old man laughed bitterly. "You would dare to stand there and ask me that question? Cliff, I've been afraid of this for several days. Last night you were brought here, suffering from an injury which was inflicted at the time you

held up and robbed Freedland's jewelry store in Oxbow.

"Your face was filled with birdshot from Freedland's shotgun. Hartley and Stevens found you just after the holdup, where you had accidentally injured yourself in the dark. The jewelry was all scattered around, where it had fallen. Your mask was beside you. Now, can you stand there and deny that you are the Trey of Spades?"

Cliff was staring at his father, his face gone white under the accusations. Hashknife's eyes shifted from the two men and looked at the doorway, where the minister stood, a puzzled expression on his face. None of them knew how long he had been there, but he had surely been there long enough to have heard Dad Parker's accusation of his son.

Cliff shook his head and started to speak, but Hashknife forestalled anything further by saying:

"Here's the preacher who rides on his church."

Dad Parker and Cliff turned quickly.

"Pardon me," smiled the minister. "I was going past; so I stopped for a minute or two."

"Oh, yes," Dad Parker's voice was barely a whisper. "You ju-just stopped. Well, won't you go up to the house?"

"Thank you, Mr. Parker." He glanced at Hashknife and Sleepy, turned and walked slowly toward the house. Hashknife walked to the door, leaning on the casing, watching the minister go into the house. Then, without turning his head, he said:

"Dad, I'm afraid he heard everythin' yuh said."

"Well, suppose he did," Cliff laughed harshly. "It don't seem to be any secret."

"There are only four of us, except you," said Sleepy.

Dad Parker turned away and started for the door. His anger had burned out, and with it had burned several years of his life. His hand groped uncertainly at the doorway as he went out and walked toward the house, like a man with the weight of the world on his shoulders.

Cliff stared after him and his face softened as he turned to Hashknife.

"It—it looks like they've got the deadwood on me, don't it, Hartley?"

"The law hasn't—yet."

"It's a funny thing." Cliff sighed deeply and shook his head. "I feel like I've missed a few months out of my life."

"Don't remember doin' these things?"

"No. I reckon — say, what day and month is this?"

Hashknife pointed to a calendar on the wall, and Cliff walked closer to examine it. Hashknife and Sleepy exchanged glances. Lapse of memory had already been established as a point of defense, and they felt that Cliff might be going to claim such a condition.

But he turned away from the calendar and sat down on a bunk, thinking deeply.

"How much time have you forgot?" queried Hashknife.

"Not a —— day."

"Then you remember everythin', eh?"

"Well," Cliff smiled wryly, "not what Dad accuses me of, if that's what yuh mean."

"All right. Then how do yuh account for bein' where we found yuh last night, flat on your back, with jewels scattered all around yuh and yore face punctured with birdshot?"

Cliff held his head in his hands, staring wide-eyed at the floor.

"I can't tell yuh, Hartley. It's all too hazy."

He got to his feet and moved toward the door.

"I'm goin' to town, if anybody asks about me."

"Don't be a fool!" exploded Hashknife. "The sheriff is lookin' for a shot-marked man, and your face looks like you've had the small-pox."

"I've got to have a drink," declared Cliff. "There ain't a drink on the ranch, and if I don't get a shot of whisky pretty soon, I'll kill somebody — or myself. I — I —" he snapped his fingers nervously—"I've just got to have it. To —— with the sheriff and the law."

"Well, I s'pose that's up to you," said Hashknife. He picked the hat from under the bunk and tossed it to Cliff.

"If you've got to go, don't go bareheaded. Here's yore hat."

Cliff straightened out the sombrero, looked inside it and threw it back onto the table.

"That ain't my hat."

"It ain't your hat?" Hashknife gasped at him.

"—— no! Mine's a perfectly good

Stetson, and she's got my initials in the sweat-band."

He whirled and went outside, leaving Hashknife and Sleepy staring at the hat which Hashknife had brought from the scene of the crime. Hashknife turned the hat slowly in his fingers. There were several tiny holes in the top of the crown, where some of the old jeweler's birdshot had penetrated the felt, and along the brim were several pencil-like marks where the tiny pellets of lead had scraped.

"It ain't his hat," said Hashknife, half to himself. "His hat has his initials in the sweat-band. And I'll betcha a hundred-to-one that Jud Farley had that hat. Sleepy, we've got somebody's old discard."

"We haven't," stated Sleepy. "You have. Don't blame it onto me, cowboy."

And while Hashknife and Sleepy wondered, "Hat, hat, who's got the hat," the Reverend Mr. Jones sat in the living-room of the Maverick ranch house and tried to make conversation with Milly and Dad Parker. Dorothy was in her room, changing her dress, making herself more beautiful for Cliff's sake, while he was riding wildly back toward town, with his soul shrieking for whisky.

"I am making wonderful progress with my church," offered the minister. "Mr. Cole is giving me every assistance in fixing up the old building, and it will not be long until we have a suitable place of worship."

"Yes, yes, I suppose so." Milly awoke from her abstraction long enough to know that some reply was necessary. Dad Parker sat in stony silence.

"And I think that it will be a very good thing for this country." The minister persisted in talking. "There has been a need for religious revival in Thunder county. It is really a shame—almost a heathenish—if I may use that word—condition."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Milly slowly. "We need something, that is a sure thing."

She got to her feet and walked to the front door. If the minister would only go away it would relieve the situation to some extent, she thought. She did not want to talk with him—nor to any one else for that matter. Since her father had told her what he knew about Cliff, she had been in a daze.

He got up and walked over to her. Dad Parker looked at him, wondering how much he had heard at the bunkhouse. Milly moved out onto the porch and the minister came out beside her.

"Milly," he said softly, "you are in trouble. I know that. In fact I overheard a conversation between your father and brother, which was—well, enough to make me understand the situation."

"You heard?" Milly stared at him.

"Yes. I know that your brother is the Trey of Spades, Milly."

She turned away and stared blankly. This was worse than she had imagined.

"It is too bad," he said slowly, "and I want you to know how sorry I feel."

"And," he continued after a moment, "I want you to understand that this does not affect my respect for your father nor my—er—feelings toward you, Milly."

"Toward me?" Milly turned and looked at him.

"Yes," he admitted, half-bashfully. "I am not afraid to tell you that I think you are the finest girl I have ever met. It is difficult for folks to imagine that a minister might fall in love with a girl; but that is just what I have done."

"But—but you mustn't do that." Milly was half-crying with nervousness. "Don't you see I can't talk with you? Everything is wrong—everything!"

"Not everything, Milly. I love you."

"Well, I don't love you, don't you see? I—I like you, but—but I don't love anybody."

"You don't mean that, Milly. When you calm down you will feel differently about it."

"No, I won't!" Milly shook her head violently. "Please go away, won't you?"

The minister turned slowly away, his eyes hardening slightly, and started down the steps toward his horse, while Milly turned and went back into the house. He stopped at the foot of the steps and looked back toward the empty porch, before he mounted his horse.

As he rode toward the gate, Hashknife walked over from the bunkhouse and intercepted him. Neither of them spoke for several seconds. Then Hashknife said:

"How much of it did you hear?"

"About all of it, I think." The minister's voice was crisp and hard. Hashknife squinted curiously at him.

"About all of it, eh? Uh-huh!" thoughtfully. "And how much of it are yuh goin' to tell?"

"How much am I going to tell? What

makes you think I am going to tell any of it?"

"Because," Hashknife's grin was aimed to take off some of the sting, "yuh don't look like a man I'd trust with a secret."

"Really?" The minister straightened in his saddle at the direct insult. "That is not very complimentary, Hartley."

"——, I didn't mean it as a compliment."

"No?"

"No-o-o. Yuh see, they taught me in Sunday school to tell the truth. If my talk offends yuh—blame religion. If so much of my Sunday school teacher's talk hadn't stuck to my brain, I'd prob'ly lie to you like other folks do."

"A paragon, eh?"

"Mebbe," said Hashknife, after a moment, "it's a good thing I don't *sabe* that word."

"Possibly. Now just where are we getting to in this conversation?"

"Right back to where we started, Deacon. You heard Dad Parker accuse Cliff of being the Trey of Spades. Cliff didn't deny it. The question is this—are yuh goin' to tell what yuh heard?"

"Why should I?"

"And there yuh are," Hashknife flapped his arms wearily. "I'd just as soon argue with an old woman as a preacher. They always say 'because,' or 'why.' My ——, do yuh think I want to ask questions and answer 'em myself?"

The minister smiled at Hashknife's serious expression.

"Would it be a Christian thing to do, Hartley—to tell?"

"What do I know about Christian things?"

"We seem to be deadlocked again."

Hashknife laughed and shook his head.

"We sure are, pardner."

"Are you trying to coerce the church, Hartley?"

"I ain't sure. I've got a hazy idea what that word means, but I do know this: We've got a sheriff to chase criminals, and we've got a preacher to chase the devil. The sheriff ain't got nothin' on the devil, and the minister hadn't ought to chase criminals. It 'pears to me that they'd both do pretty well if they minded their own business, as far as they are personally concerned."

"That is not a bad philosophy, Hartley."

The Reverend Mr. Jones picked up his reins, laughing softly. "I think it can be carried out—as far as the preacher is concerned."

"That's fine," smiled Hashknife. "I'll answer for the sheriff. If he monkeys with yore Gospel, let me know, will yuh?"

"I will, Hartley. As soon as my church is inhabitable, I would like to see you in the congregation."

"Yuh might, at that," laughed Hashknife. "So-long, *compadre*."

"Good-by."

CLIFF lost no time in getting to Oxbow, and his horse was dripping with sweat when he drew up at the Cheyenne hitch-rack. Jud Farley had seen Cliff ride into town, and there was considerable of a pucker between the sheriff's eyes as he speculated upon things.

He watched Cliff hurry into the saloon, and his conclusions were that Cliff was badly in need of a drink. After a short wait he sauntered over to the Cheyenne and eased himself inside.

Cliff was at the bar, leaning on his elbows and looking at his reflection in the back-bar mirror.

His body tensed slightly as he saw the sheriff's face reflected in the glass, but he did not turn.

"Howdy, Cliff," said the sheriff pleasantly as he moved in beside him. "Have a little drink?"

"Thank yuh, Jud; I've had enough for now."

Cliff turned and they looked at each other. The sheriff's eyes flashed to the bandage, but he did not remark about it.

"Bronc throwed me off in a mesquite," said Cliff slowly. "I was back in the hills. That —— mesquite sure punches yuh full of holes."

The sheriff nodded thoughtfully.

"It's mean stuff, Cliff. Lost yore hat, too, eh?"

"Uh-huh. Got to get me a new one. I was kinda knocked out and went away without it. Mebbe I could find the place, but it's doubtful."

"Bronc throwed yuh, yuh say?"

"Yeah—not my bronc though. He's in the stable here in town. I was kinda wobbly; so I went to the ranch in the wagon. I was ridin' another bronc when I got throwed."

"Uh-huh," Farley smiled, because he knew that Cliff's horse was still in the livery-stable, and he decided that Cliff was a first-class liar. Then it suddenly struck him that Cliff had not lied about it all. That Maverick ranch wagon had been in town the night before, and had gone back to the ranch while he and Buck were trying to pick up the trail of the bandit.

"I was out to the ranch this mornin'," offered Farley. "I seen Dorothy Clement. By golly, she's a nice girl, Cliff."

"Yeah," said Cliff thoughtfully. "I'm sorry I was out in the hills and didn't get to meet her at the train."

"Yeah, it was too bad."

Farley knew that Cliff hadn't been in the hills. He had seen Cliff in Oxbow that afternoon, and Cliff was in no condition to ride a horse. And Cliff knew that Farley did not believe him.

"You heard about the jewel robbery, didn't yuh?" queried the sheriff.

"They talked about it at the ranch," said Cliff easily. "Didn't amount to much as long as the jeweler got his stuff all back. That Trey of Spades has sure got nerve."

"Yeah, but he's careless."

"Thasso?" Cliff's eyes studied a framed picture on the opposite wall. "Well, I suppose they all get careless. Wouldn't be much use for jails, if they didn't. Let's have a drink, Jud."

They drank and turned away from the bar. Vincent Roche came swinging through the front door but stopped suddenly at sight of Cliff's bandaged head.

"What hit you?" he asked.

Cliff explained about being thrown off his horse in the hills. Roche listened closely, a half-smile on his face. He knew that Cliff had not been in condition to ride into the hills, but he felt that Cliff had a good reason for lying about it in the presence of the sheriff.

"I was over to the ranch to see yuh," said Roche, anxious to change the subject. "I met the Reverend Jones, who had also been there."

"Had he?" Cliff smiled grimly. "Some day——"

"You let the preacher alone," advised the sheriff dryly. "He's needed around here."

"Then keep him around here," retorted Cliff. "We don't need him out at the Maverick," and then to Roche, "Did yuh go out to the ranch, Vint?"

Roche shook his hand,

"No. The sky-pilot told me that you had pulled out for town; so I rode back here with him. He invited me to church."

Farley smiled and walked away. He knew that there was nothing further to be gained from talking to Cliff. They watched him disappear.

"You went out in the hills and got bucked off in a mesquite," said Roche slowly. "That's fine. Dorothy showed up; so you better brace up and behave yourself. Now tell me somethin' about those two new punchers at the Maverick."

"What do yuh want to know about 'em, Vint?"

"Are they just a pair of driftin' cowpunchers, or are they here to try and find the Trey of Spades?"

Cliff squinted thoughtfully. Then,

"Just cowpunchers, Vint."

"Are yuh sure?"

"Well, I'm as sure as death or taxes. What do you want to know for?"

"Just curious, tha'sall. Let's go and take a whirl at the old wheel."

"I'll look on," grinned Cliff. "I'm sure lookin' for cheap amusement."

The sheriff went back to his office, where Buck was asleep on a cot, and sat down to try and plan just what to do. Buck awoke in a bad humor, as usual, but grew interested when the sheriff told him about Cliff's injuries.

"Looks kinda bad for Cliff," agreed Buck. "I wonder why the blasted fool came back thataway."

"Got thirsty, I reckon."

"You didn't have much luck with that feller Hartley, did yuh?" queried Buck.

Farley shook his head.

"Not what you'd notice."

Buck cleared his throat raspingly and shifted his position.

"I'm suspicious of them two, Jud. I tell yuh, they're laughin' at us all the time. Dang 'em, they know too much t' suit me."

"Aw, ——, they couldn't have anythin' to do with this."

"Well, suppose it ain't Cliff? Who's the next bet?'

"I'm not bettin', Buck. If it ain't Cliff—I'll eat my old shirt."

"Then why in —— don'tcha arrest him?"

"And have Hartley, Stevens, Dad Parker and Milly prove an alibi for him, eh?"

"That's the —— of it!" snorted Buck disgustedly. "Every hand is agin' us, Jud. 'Pears to me that the law ain't pop'lar no more. I'm sure glad we're goin' to have a church. If a lot of these jiggers would git the Ten Commandments drilled into 'em, me and you would have an easier job."

"How many of 'em do you know, Buck?"

"——, I don't have to know 'em."

"You're pure, are yuh?"

"Jist like the driven snow," said Buck savagely. "And I git poorer and poorer every year. Pure and poverty-stricken. Them two words fit together jist like meanness and money."

The rest of the day was uneventful. Several times the sheriff went to the Cheyenne and found Vincent Roche bucking the roulette wheel. Cliff was not playing; so the sheriff decided that Cliff was either broke or afraid to show too much money.

It was after dark when Buck joined him and they went to the Rodeo restaurant. Blackie Dahl was there, sitting moodily at a table, alone. He had been drinking steadily all day.

"Prob'ly got turned down by the Countess," said Buck. "That's kind of specialty with her—turnin' 'em down. But I don't blame her for ditchin' Blackie. My —— he's a awful specimen of humanity."

"Don't talk so loud," advised the sheriff. "Blackie's in a bad humor."

"Aw, ——! We'll have to kill him sometime, Jud; so it might as well be one time as another."

Jud grinned and attacked his food. In a few minutes Hashknife and Sleepy came in and sat down at the nearest table. Buck glowered at them, but the sheriff seemed pleased. As soon as he finished his meal he went over and took a vacant chair beside Hashknife.

"Well, what's new?" asked Hashknife.

"Nothin' new," The sheriff rested his elbows on the table and chewed thoughtfully on a toothpick.

Hashknife and Sleepy finished their meal and got up from the table. Buck went out ahead of them and crossed the street, but the sheriff waited for them to pay their check and met them outside.

"I don't want to seem to be ridin' you fellers, but I'd sure like to trade talk with yuh." The sheriff was apologetic.

"Trade talk?" Hashknife grinned.

"Yeah. I want yuh to understand that I ain't jumpin' at no conclusions; *sabe?* With what I already know I could make a lot of grief for somebody; but I ain't hangin' crape on doorways until I've got the old deadwood planted."

"That's sure square of yuh, Farley; and I might trade on that basis—if you talk first."

"All right. Come down to my office, will yuh?"

They walked down the street and went into the office. The sheriff lighted the oil lamp, closed the door, and the three of them sat down beside his desk.

"I'm goin' to play my cards face up," stated the sheriff. "Beatin' around the bush ain't goin' to get me nothin' with you two. Cliff Parker held up that jewelry store last night, got hurt and was taken to the ranch by you fellers."

Hashknife and Sleepy squinted at each other.

"I'm playin' 'em in sight," warned the sheriff. "You two went into that back yard, while me and Buck went ridin'. There's blood on the ground where the robber laid, and it wasn't hard to trail him to the hitch-rack. Cliff's got his head all bandaged up today and there's shot marks on his face. He got enough shot to make him blunder into that fence, where he bumped himself. The plunder flew out of his hands. All this was dead easy to read. Now, I'm askin' you to talk a little."

"But why do yuh say it was Cliff Parker?" grinned Hashknife. "You only know that Cliff has been hurt. He said he got throwed into a mesquite bush."

"Mesquite, ——! I'll show yuh how I know."

The sheriff hitched over to his desk and drew open one of the drawers. He scowled deeply, and reached for the lamp with his other hand. After a close inspection, while the two cowboys watched him closely, he lifted his hand from the drawer and tossed a playing card on to the table, face up. It was the trey of spades.

The sheriff looked searchingly at the two men, and poked at the card with his finger.

"Two hours ago Cliff Parker's hat was in that drawer," he said slowly. "It ain't there now."

"Turned into the trey of spades, eh?" queried Hashknife seriously.

Farley's eyes hardened and his lips drew into a straight, level line.

"I didn't ask yuh for much help, Hartley," he said coldly, "but I do ask yuh not to interfere with the law."

Hashknife leaned across the desk and squinted in the sheriff's face.

"Do yuh mean to say that we stole the hat?"

Farley's eyes shifted under Hashknife's steady gaze and he looked at the card.

"We didn't, Farley," said Hashknife. "I figured that you had the hat, and I'd 'a' stole it, if I had the chance."

The sheriff sighed and leaned back in his chair.

"Well, there's no evidence left, that's a cinch. I was a fool to leave it in that drawer."

Hashknife picked up the card and examined it. The back of it was an intricate design, printed in blue. It had never been used, because it was as white and crisp as a card from a new deck.

"Are all his cards like this?" asked Hashknife.

The sheriff rummaged in another drawer and took out another trey of spades with the same colored back.

"That's the one he left at the jeweler's place."

"Can I take this one?" asked Hashknife.

"Yeah. I dunno what good it'll do yuh, though."

Hashknife pocketed it and they went over to the Cheyenne. Blackie Dahl was at the bar, and he glared at them, but did not speak. His eyes were almost crossed from excessive drinking but he did not stagger. They went into the gambling room and looked over the games. Cliff was humped in a look-out chair, with a glass of liquor in his hand, watching the play.

"He ain't been playin' today," observed the sheriff.

"Prob'ly broke," said Hashknife.

"Prob'ly not," replied the sheriff dryly. "I wonder where Roche is?"

Blackie passed them, going toward the dance-hall, and Slim Cole met them at the entrance. He glanced at Blackie and grinned widely.

"Blackie's workin' up a grudge," he said. "Vint Roche has been talkin' with the Countess for an hour, and Blackie has been wanderin' around like a lost duck."

They moved into the dance-hall, dodging the dancers, and gained a position near the orchestra. About half-way down, on the opposite side, sat Vincent Roche and the Countess in close conversation.

"Roche hit the wheel for a lot of money today," said Slim. "He must have cashed in about two thousand dollars."

"Not so good for you, eh?" said Hashknife.

"Aw, I'll get it all back."

"With interest," added the sheriff.

"That's the beauty of this business," laughed Slim. "It's like makin' a loan. Once in a while yuh find a man who is wise enough to keep what he wins, but the majority of 'em can't forget how easy it was to get."

Blackie Dahl had been bumped by several dancers, which did not increase his humor to any extent. He moved closer to Roche, although trying to appear indifferent. It amused Slim Cole, but not so Jud Farley.

"Blackie is drunk enough to be dangerous," said Jud. "If Roche is wise he'll watch that son-of-a-gun."

Suddenly a dancing couple collided with Blackie, knocking him almost into Roche, who looked up at Blackie and said something. A moment later Blackie had flung the table aside and stepped back, reaching for his gun.

But whisky had slowed Blackie's speed, and before he could use the gun Roche smashed him full in the face, knocking him half-way across the hall, where he sprawled full-length on the floor. The orchestra stopped with a crash and the dancers scattered.

Instinct had caused Blackie to cling to his gun, in spite of the blow, but before he could recover sufficiently to use it, Roche's right foot was on it, crushing it out of his hand. Jud Farley crossed to them and helped Blackie to his feet.

The punch had loosened all of Blackie's front teeth and had driven the whisky from his brain. He looked weakly around, as if wondering what it was all about.

"You go home and sober up." advised the sheriff.

"That's good advice," agreed Roche, examining his skinned knuckles. "And next time you start to draw on me—look out, Blackie."

"Yeah?" Blackie spat painfully, turned on his heel and went out of the place.

"Whipped," declared a cowboy.

"Not whipped," said the sheriff. "Yuh can't whip this kind."

Roche went back, straightened the table and sat down again.

"He's no milk-fed infant himself," said Sleepy. "He sure cooled Mister Dahl with one punch."

Hashknife and Sleepy drifted back through the gambling room. Cliff was still in the look-out chair, joking with the players.

"We might as well go home," said Hashknife. Sleepy nodded and they went back to their horses.

"Cliff ain't as big a fool as I thought he was," observed Sleepy, as they rode back to the ranch.

"And the funny part of it is," laughed Hashknife, "Jud Farley didn't get any trade-talk out of us. He told us all he knew, Sleepy. I was sure he had that hat, and I didn't lie when I told him I would have stolen it."

"Yeah, I suppose yuh would, Hashknife. Didn't we agree to keep out of other people's business?"

"Well, yeah, we did. I ain't hornin' into anythin', Sleepy. We won't get any deeper into this thing. Cliff is clear, as far as the law is concerned."

"Yeah—as far as the law is concerned."

"Well, that's as far as we can go, Sleepy. I know how Dad and Milly must feel about it. It's a —— of a jolt. But it kinda looks like folks were put on this earth to suffer. For every whisky glass full of joy there's a five-gallon demijohn of bitter misery for a chaser."

"That's true, Hashknife. Still, me and you ain't never been so danged unhappy."

"Because we don't mind our own business, I s'pose. We've been so busy foolin' with other people's troubles that we ain't never had time to have any for ourselves."

They rode in at the ranch and stabled their horses. As they walked back toward the bunkhouse, Milly came to meet them.

"Where is Cliff?" she asked.

"He's still in Oxbow," said Hashknife.

"Drinking?"

"N-not an awful lot," Hashknife hesitated.

"Oh, I don't know what to do," said Milly wearily. "Dorothy knows that something is wrong, but I can't tell her the truth. She has been crying all the evening. She—she thinks that Cliff don't love her any more. I'd rather have her think that than to know the real truth of the matter."

"Prob'ly be better."

"What about the sheriff?"

"Don'tcha worry about him, Milly. He had Cliff's hat; found it out back of the jewelry store, But he ain't got it now."

"Oh, did you get it, Hashknife?"

"No-o-o, we didn't, Milly. There was a trey of spades in its place."

"Oh!"

"How's Dad?" asked Sleepy.

"Dad?" Milly looked back at the yellow lights from a window. "Dad is reading."

"Readin'?"

"Yes—the Bible."

"Uh-huh."

"Prob'ly do him good," observed Hashknife softly.

"I don't know how much it will do him," Milly laughed wearily. "You see, he never read it before."

"Well, he's old enough to know what it's about," said Hashknife thoughtfully. "Is there anythin' we can do, Milly?"

"Not a thing. I wish Cliff would come home. If he don't come pretty soon I'll be tempted to tell Dorothy the whole thing and let her faint dead away. And she probably will, too."

"Might be a good stunt," said Sleepy. "She'll be better off, if she knows the whole thing."

"No, she won't," declared Hashknife. "She thinks Cliff is all right. There's been many a brand snatched from the burnin', as the preacher said. We're takin' a lot for granted."

"What do you mean by that?" queried Milly anxiously. "You don't mean that there's a possible chance of Cliff not being guilty, do you?"

"He's guilty of bein' a fool. He's guilty of drinkin' too much hooch and all that, Milly."

"And of falling in love with a honkatonk girl," added Milly.

"Well," Hashknife chuckled slightly, "there's a few things yuh might excuse him for."

"Hashknife met her," laughed Sleepy. "But thank gosh she's too fickle to rope him for long. She shifted from Cliff to Blackie Dahl, and now she's got Vincent Roche roped and hog-tied."

"Oh!" exclaimed Milly softly. "Vincent Roche."

Sleepy knew that he had talked too much, but it was too late to retract it now. Milly turned away without another word and went back toward the house. Hashknife swore softly, as they went on into the bunkhouse and lighted the lamp.

"You sure talked too much," said Hashknife sadly.

"I know it. I didn't stop t' think about Roche bein' a regular visitor. I reckon I've just added to her misery, Hashknife."

Hashknife nodded over his cigaret making,

"Yeah, I s'pose so. And old Dad up there readin' the Bible; tryin' to get some comfort for his soul. Oh, ——!" Hashknife got to his feet and paced the length of the bunkhouse. It was not often that he exhibited anger, and Sleepy squinted at him closely, wondering what was coming next. Hashknife stopped at the table and looked down at Sleepy.

"Cowboy, we've got to foller out our natural inclinations."

"Meanin' which?" Seriously.

"Up there in the house is an old man, tryin' to find out in the Bible that his son still has a chance, Sleepy. There's a girl up there cryin' her heart out because she thinks that her feller don't love her no more. And there's a game little sister up there, tryin' to keep a stiff upper-lip through it all.

"And down here in the bunkhouse are two —— fool cowpunchers who ain't got no business of their own, and have sworn to mind it. Now, you can do as you —— please, Sleepy. Stick to yore pledge, cowboy, if yuh want to; but I hereby bust —— out of mine; *sabe?*"

"Well," Sleepy grinned softly and stretched out his legs comfortably, "I been wonderin' how long we could stand for our own affairs. Just which end of this affair do we start gnawin' on, Hashknife?"

"The first end we run into. By golly, I feel like a feller who hears the dentist say, 'Well, it's out.' "

Sleepy yawned and began pulling off his boots,

"This is our land of milk and honey, Hashknife," he bantered. "A land where the coyote files off his teeth and eats grass with the cows. We came huntin' peace and it didn't taste good."

Hashknife merely grinned widely. He knew that Sleepy was anxious for action, and was only talking for effect. They went to bed, and in about an hour Cliff came in. He was half-drunk, but was careful to not disturb them.

Feigning sleep Hashknife watched him take a quantity of money out of his pocket and stuff it under his pillow. It was impossible to estimate the amount, but it looked sufficient to excite Hashknife's curiosity. Cliff seemed to be in good spirits, whistling softly to himself as he undressed. He knocked the chimney off the lamp, trying to extinguish it, and mumbled an apology as he crawled into his bunk.

"I TELL yuh I'm about through." Harmony leaned against the kitchen doorway and delivered his ultimatum. "By ——, I don't mind a little gloom, but I draws the line at too much of it. Won't nobody eat. They set down at the table, look like they're goin' to bawl about somethin', and then plumb ignore my cookin'. I tell yuh, it's too —— solemn to suit me."

Hashknife looked up from the washbasin, his face dripping, and reached for the towel.

"Is it as bad as that, Harmony?" he asked.

"As bad? ——, I ain't got el-o-cution enough to express m'self. Cliff comes up here early and he runs into Dorothy. She's cried until there ain't no moisture left in her system. Yes, sir, she's been cryin' over that —— fool half-baked kid; weepin' over the fact that he don't love her no more. My, ——, if she had any sense she'd be wavin' a flag and cheerin'.

"And does she fall into his arms? Does she? Like —— she does. She turns him down as cold as old man January. Whooee! I hears him say, 'Dot, what is the matter?' Ha, ha, ha, ha! Him down at Oxbow lappin' up liquor, and her up here bawlin' cause he don't come home—and he wants to know what's the matter.

"Well, she don't tell him what's the matter; so he follers her into the house, tryin' to find out. Ain't a man in love a awful —— fool. I'm just about makin' up my mind to stay single, I'll tell yuh that. Gloom? Whooee!"

Hashknife and Sleepy laughed at Harmony's disgusted expression. Cliff had awoke and left the bunk-house ahead of them, and they were curious to know about his reception.

"How's Dad Parker?" asked Hashknife softly.

"Him?" Harmony spat explosively and hooked his thumbs over the waist-band of his overalls. "Well, sir, I dunno. I like the old man. I've been with him quite a while, and I thought I knew him kinda well." Harmony shook his head sadly, "I don't know him a-tall.

"Of course he feels bad about Cliff. It's plumb natural for a pa to feel bad when his offspring de-parts from the strait and narrer and goes bumpety-bump toward——; but if I ever git married and have a son that gits bogged down, I'll spit on my hands, load up the old six-gun and find out who in —— threw the switch on him—and not read any Bible!

"Now, I ain't sayin' that the Bible ain't good readin', yuh understand. It's jist like a cook-book or a almanac—all right for what it's intended—but in a case like this, action speaks a —— sight stronger than printed words. Now, if you jaspers want to eat—say so. I'll throw a flock of ham and aigs together for yuh in a minute, and I'm the best cook between here and there, but I ain't cookin' for somebody to sigh over."

"About four eggs for me, Harmony," said Hashknife, "and not more than that many for Sleepy. And if yuh cut that ham thin, I'll measure yuh for a harp. Make the coffee for grown men; *sabe?*"

"My ——, there still is joy in the world!" Harmony fairly skidded into the kitchen and began rattling the pans.

They squatted on their heels against the house and waited for Harmony to call them. Cliff came around from the front of the house, walking with his head down, and almost ran into them.

His face was a trifle drawn and in the harsh light of day he looked much older than his years.

"Mornin', Cliff," said Hashknife pleasantly. "Yuh kinda beat us out of bed this mornin'."

Cliff nodded, but did not speak. It was evident that he was not interested. Milly came out through the kitchen and stopped in the doorway. She looked tired, weary, and did not speak to Hashknife and Sleepy. In a few moments Dorothy came out behind her.

It was evident that Dorothy had spent a sleepless night and an unpleasant morning. She seemed on the verge of crying, but at sight of Cliff she braced up and tried to appear indifferent.

"Yore breakfast is ready, you two punchers!" sang out Harmony. "Come and git it!"

They got to their feet and started past the two girls, when Milly said:

"I wonder who this is?"

They turned and looked down the road, where a lone horseman was coming. He swung in at the gate and rode straight up to them. It was Buck Hardy. He lifted his hat and eased himself in the saddle, as he spoke directly to Cliff.

"When did you see Vincent Roche last, Cliff?"

"Vincent Roche?" Cliff squinted at Buck. "Why, Buck?"

"Somebody shot him last night."

"Shot him?" It was Milly's voice, almost a croak.

"Yeah—shot him. He had a lot of money with him, so Slim Cole says. He didn't have any when we found him."

Hashknife put a hand on Milly's shoulder to steady her. She was staring into space, her hands clenched tightly.

"Sid Franklin found him," continued Buck. "He was at the forks of the road. And stickin' in his bosom was a trey of spades."

"Was he dead?" asked Hashknife.

"Danged near it. I dunno whether he's got a chance or not. The doctor's workin' on him."

Hashknife grasped Milly by both shoulders.

"Brace up," he whispered. "He's still alive."

She nodded dumbly. Cliff was staring at the ground, trying to think.

"How much money did Roche have, Cliff?" asked Buck.

"I don't know!" Cliff threw up his head defiantly. "I'm not his banker. Slim Cole ought to know how much Vint won yesterday."

"Well, I s'pose that's right," said Buck slowly. "Somebody seems to have the idea that you and Roche rode away together last night."

"Somebody, eh? Who said we did?"

"Just somebody, Cliff."

"Yeah? Do you think you can fasten this onto me?"

"Not me," Buck shook his head. "I

ain't tryin' to fasten it onto anybody, Cliff. I just wanted to know, tha'sall."

"Well, you've found out."

Cliff swung away from the house and headed for the stable. Buck looked after him thoughtfully. Milly and Dorothy had gone into the house, and Harmony was standing in the doorway, holding a pan in his hand. Buck turned back to Hashknife and Sleepy, and a look of understanding passed between them.

"Well, I reckon I'll be ridin' back to Oxbow," said Buck.

"Wait until we saddle up and we'll ride with yuh," offered Hashknife. "Come on, Sleepy."

They saddled quickly and rode away with Buck. Cliff watched them ride away, a puzzled expression in his eyes, while in the kitchen door stood Harmony, his head bowed in thought. Suddenly he looked around, stepped to the stove and picked up a frying-pan. He strode to the door, and with a flip of his hand, sent eight fried eggs spinning out into the yard.

"I'm jist about through," he told them. "It's gittin' so that they don't even set down at the table."

Buck showed Hashknife and Sleepy where Roche had been found, lying beside the road, near where the Diamond V road intersected with the county highway.

"Jud told me about losin' that hat," said Buck meaningly, as they rode on toward town.

"I reckon he still blames us," grinned Hashknife. "But he's all wrong, Hardy. We would have swiped it if we had a chance."

"That's what Jud said. I dunno why somebody is always tryin' to block the law. This is the first killin' that the Trey of Spades has done, and yuh bet it'll go hard with him when he's caught. Thunder county is plumb tired of that whippoorwill."

"Who do yuh think it is?" queried Hashknife.

"Who?" Buck grinned sourly. "Well, figure it out for yourself, Hartley."

"Cliff and Roche were the best of friends."

"Yeah—sure. And Cliff needed money. Roche had over two thousand dollars when he left the Cheyenne last night."

"If Cliff is the Trey of Spades—did he need money?"

Buck frowned at this new angle. It had never occurred to him that the Trey of Spades must have accumulated considerable money in a few months.

"Somethin' to that," he admitted. "Still, a couple of thousand is quite a argument agin' it, Hartley."

Hashknife knew that Buck's argument was logical, and he also knew that Cliff had money when he came home. It looked bad for Cliff. They rode into town and found Farley at his office.

"He's still alive," said Farley in answer to their questions. "He's badly hurt and the doctor don't hold out much hope for him. Shot twice."

"From behind?" asked Hashknife.

"What made yuh think that?" asked Farley quickly.

"The reasonable thing to do. Roche is a gunman. The Trey of Spades would know that, Farley."

Farley nodded thoughtfully.

"Yeah, I s'pose that's true. Anyway, Roche was shot from behind with a rifle."

"Where did they find his horse?"

"It came to the ranch. That's why Franklin went lookin' for Roche early this mornin'. There was blood all over the saddle."

"All over it, eh?"

"Yeah. I've got the saddle here in the back room."

"I want to see it later," said Hashknife. "Buck said there was a trey of spades."

Farley took it from his pocket and handed it to him. It was not a new card and was of the brand known as "Steamboats." Hashknife examined it closely and gave it back to Farley. They went to the rear room and looked at Roche's saddle. It was an expensive thing, studded with silver; but just now it looked as if it had been dragged through a slaughter-house.

"Franklin brought the horse and saddle with him," said Farley. "The horse is in the livery stable."

"What's your theory?" asked Hashknife.

Farley's grunt was very expressive. They went back to the front office and out into the street.

"How about Blackie Dahl?" asked Hashknife.

"Not enough brains," Farley shook his head. "Blackie is just a cold-blooked snake, tha'sall. The Trey of Spades has got more sense than an ordinary outlaw."

"Roche knocked him down last night," reminded Hashknife.

"Yeah, that's true. But yore pardner shot a gun out of his hand and made him look cheap; and yore pardner is still alive."

"I reckon you've got the right hunch."

As they stood together, thinking it over, the minister came from the livery-stable where he had just stabled his horse. He came up to them, with a smile on his dusty face.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he greeted them pleasantly.

Farley shook hands with him.

"I reckon we're goin' to need yuh, Jones."

"Need me?" The smile faded, as he studied the serious face of the sheriff. "What is the matter, Sheriff?"

"The Trey of Spades shot Vincent Roche last night, and he prob'ly won't get well."

"The Trey of Spades shot Vincent Roche?" The minister was thoroughly shocked.

"Yeah. Shot him and stole somethin' over two thousand."

The Reverend Jones removed his hat and brushed back his hair nervously.

"Tell me more about this, Sheriff?"

In a few words Farley told him what they knew about the affair.

"Shot him in the back," said the minister bitterly, "and left the Trey of Spades on his bosom. Has the doctor any hopes for him?"

"Just about one chance in a hundred."

"Not very great. You say he is at the doctor's home? I will go there at once and see what I can do to help."

He nodded shortly and hurried on up the street.

"That's my type of preacher," said Farley. "He don't try to act like he was so —— much better than everybody else."

"Pleasant sort of a jigger," admitted Hashknife. "What kind of a sermon does he preach?"

"Never heard him yet. He's been here quite a while, but yuh see he ain't had no place to preach. He rides from one place to another, kinda makin' the rounds. I'll betcha he'll sure have a crowd when he does preach."

"I'd like to hear him," said Hashknife.

"Yuh might get the chance. They're fixin' over that old saloon for him to use as a church, and it ought to be ready in a week or so."

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy drifted over to the Cheyenne. The shooting of Vincent Roche was the main topic of conversation and there was none of the usual hilarity. Slim Cole met them with a grave smile, and with his usual invitation to have a drink; but they declined.

Blackie Dahl was there, sitting alone at a card-table. He glanced at Hashknife and Sleepy, a bit of a sarcastic smile on his thin lips. He seemed entirely sober, watchful; more dangerous sober than drunk. He must have known that men were hinting that he might have shot Vincent Roche to revenge the blow, but he did not seem afraid.

Buck Hardy came in and joined them near the bar.

"Just been down to the doctor's place," he said. "Roche has a fightin' chance. The minister is down there with him now."

"It's too bad we don't know who shot him," said Slim. "This shootin' was too mean to be left to the law."

That seemed to be the general opinion of the cattlemen, as they rode into town and talked about the shooting. It was Saturday, and by the middle of the afternoon the hitch-racks were well filled with saddle-horses and vehicles of every description.

Hashknife and Sleepy sat around, listening to the talk. It was entertaining to listen to the different theories regarding the Trey of Spades. Buck Hardy was drinking heavily. It was not often that Buck looked upon the wine when it was red, but just now he had declared a holiday and was imbibing more than was good for him.

It was almost dinner time when Cliff Parker rode into town and tied his horse to a hitch-rack. There was nothing jovial about him as he strode into the Cheyenne and encountered Buck Hardy.

"C'mon and have a drink," said Buck thickly, indicating the bar with a sweep of his arm, which almost overbalanced him.

Cliff squinted at Buck and shook his head slowly.

"I don't want any drink," he said gruffly.

"Is zasso? Don't want no drink, eh? Zasso? My, my!"

There was quite a crowd at the bar and they were in the right mood to enjoy trouble. Cliff started on, but Buck grasped him by the arm. For a moment it appeared

that Cliff was about to strike Buck, but he merely jerked his arm away. The sheriff elbowed his way in, but did not interfere in any way. Hashknife and Sleepy were near Cliff, as he almost jerked Buck off his feet.

"Whatcha tryin' to do?" queried Buck angrily. "Think yo're too good to drink with me? By ——, you ain't too good. If somebody hadn't stole that hat, you'd be in jail right now."

Cliff did not move a muscle, but his eyes narrowed. Buck laughed shortly and turned to the crowd.

"He lost his hat the night he robbed the jewelry store, but somebody stole that hat from the sheriff. Gen'lemen, I introduce to you—the Trey of Spades."

Buck tried to bow and almost lost his balance. Cliff swayed forward, his right hand sweeping downward to his gun. Came the soft slap, as hand met pistol-butt; but before he could draw Hashknife was into him, fairly picking him off the floor and going toward the door with a headlong rush.

So unexpected was the move that men stepped back to give him room. But Jud Farley, the sheriff, knew. Swiftly he went out behind Hashknife and Cliff, while behind him came Sleepy, blocking the crowd long enough to give Hashknife and the sheriff time to rush Cliff across the street.

Men's voices broke into excited argument, as they realized Buck's accusation. It meant that Cliff Parker was the man who had shot Vincent Roche.

"Jud Farley knew!" cried a cowboy, back in the crowd. "We're wastin' time here."

"Aw, ——! He's got him in jail by now!" snorted another.

"Don't be a lot of —— fools!" roared Slim Cole, trying to make himself heard. "If Cliff is guilty, the law will take care of him."

Some one had procured a lariat, which they tossed toward the ceiling, and the half-drunk, reckless gang fell onto it like a pack of wolves and surged out through the door. Sleepy ran across the street, where Hashknife was standing in the doorway waiting for him. They went inside and barred the door. The jail cells were built into the rear half of the building, but had not been constructed to withstand any great assault. Jud Farley lifted a Winchester rifle and a sawed-off shotgun from pegs in the wall and laid them on his desk, while he took a supply of cartridges from his desk and spilled them into a pile.

"—— Buck!" he grumbled. "That's what whisky does to yuh. Buck will be ready to cut out his tongue when he sobers up. That crowd is half-drunk and they're willin' to take Buck's drunken talk for Gospel truth."

"What'll this place stand?" asked Hashknife, looking it over.

"A hard wind."

The sheriff stuffed the Winchester full of cartridges, while Sleepy examined the double-barrel shotgun.

"You got Cliff in a cell?" queried Sleepy. But before he got a reply, some one hammered sharply on the door.

"Go ahead and talk," said the sheriff.

"This is Franklin," said the man outside.

"All right, Franklin."

"We want Cliff Parker, Jud."

"Thasso? And then what?"

Several voices mumbled softly, as if they were conferring on their next reply.

"We've got enough men to take this building apart," said Franklin. "You haven't shot square with us, Jud. You knew that Cliff Parker was the guilty man, but you let him keep on goin'. Now—we want him; *sabe?*"

"Folks don't always get what they want," replied the sheriff. "And I wouldn't advise yuh to try takin' this shack apart. I've got two good men in here with me, and we're well heeled. If it comes to a showdown I'll hand Cliff a gun and let him defend his own life."

"You know your own business, Jud. And you know us, too. We'll give you one minute to open that door."

"All right!" The sheriff's voice rang coldly, as he moved closer to the door. "Let me tell you somethin'. That door is thin. I don't reckon it's a inch thick in any place, and it ain't hardwood. Right now there's sixteen buckshot squintin' at that door, and if you snake-hunters don't break ranks right now——"

Came the sudden scrape of boot soles, as the crowd faded away from in front of the door. They knew the evil effects of buckshot, backed by three and one-half drams of powder, and they were not taking chances.

The sheriff laughed gleefully. It was

getting dark in the room, but he did not want to light a lamp. There was a hum of voices outside, as the crowd debated.

"Prob'ly havin' another drink," grinned Farley.

A moment later a rock smashed through one of the front windows, half tearing away the heavy curtain. Sleepy did not stand on ceremony. The rock had barely crashed to the floor, when Sleepy sent a charge of buckshot screaming out through the curtain.

The concussion shook the house and the shot ripped the curtain into shreds, but the crowd had anticipated just such a move and had acted accordingly. The sheriff grabbed a blanket off a cot and ran to the window, quickly fastening it over the ruined one.

"Yuh can see we mean business, can't-cha?" yelled a voice.

"That sounds like Blackie Dahl," said Farley. "Don't pay no attention to 'em. That back door is solid oak and has a bar across it. They can't hurt us from that direction."

Some one outside fired a shot and the bullet splintered through the upper part of the front door.

"Bluffin'," declared Farley. "They know —— well we ain't up that high."

They sat down to wait for the next move. There was no more conversation. They knew that the crowd would not quit that easy. Suddenly a heavy weight crashed against the door lock, splintering the panel of the door.

"Look out!" snorted Farley. "Another like that and the door is open."

He threw up his rifle and sent three bullets through the wall to the right of the door, trying to drive the assault away from that quarter. His answer came in the shape of two bullets, which hummed through the door and splatted over their heads against the wall.

"Gittin' serious," said Farley thoughtfully, as they moved farther out of line with the door. The room was filled with powder smoke, which tickled their throats.

"Tough travelin'," said Sleepy, trying to suppress a sneeze. "I've seen places where I'd rather be than this. Let's kick the door open and give 'em ——. This —— idea of shootin' from a fort don't appeal to me. Dang it, yuh ain't even got their address."

Just then another blow crashed against the lock and the door creaked open, pieces of the lock spinning across the room.

"Flat down!" exclaimed the sheriff. "They've got us cold!"

Several voiced yelped with triumph, while others warned against being too quick to assault.

"Bring him out, Jud!" yelled a voice. "We've got yuh now! Don't be a —— fool. Your life is worth more than the life of a dirty murderer, ain't it? We'll give yuh ten seconds to come out and hand over your guns."

"What'll we do?" queried the sheriff softly.

"Nobody ever counted me out yet," said Hashknife.

The man outside was counting slowly, drawling the numerals—

"Wun-n-n-n — two-o-o-o-o-o — three-e-e-e-e——"

Came the clatter of footsteps, a muttered exclamation from the crowd outside, and a man stepped to the doorway of the office, silhouetted against the lights across the street. Three guns were trained on him from inside the building; some one outside swore viciously.

"This is a fine thing for a civilized community to do," said the man in the doorway. It was the Reverend Mr. Jones, hatless and coatless.

"Git to —— out of the door!" yelled a voice.

"It's the preacher," called one of them. "What does he want here?"

"A square deal," said the minister. "If you would stop to think this over, I would not have to ask for a square deal, friends."

"You better git out of the doorway," cautioned a voice.

The minister laughed.

"No, I do not think so. If I stand here long enough, perhaps you savages will realize that you are all wrong. You want to hang Cliff Parker—or think you do. My advice to you is: go back where you came from and let the law handle it. What right have you to hang a man?"

"The —— law won't do it!" yelled some one.

"How do you know it won't? Give it a chance. The sheriff doesn't serve hangman's knots with his warrants. And what right have you to judge Cliff Parker? The

careless remark of a drunken man isn't sufficient evidence. Go home before the sheriff has cause to arrest all of you for assault with deadly weapons."

"He'd have a —— of a time gittin' a jury to convict us." Thus some wit, who knew that such a thing would be impossible.

"Are we goin' to argue or do what we came here to do?" demanded one of them. "We've got the door open."

"He deserves hangin'," said another.

"Who—the preacher?" The wit again.

Several men laughed.

"I am glad to hear that laugh," said the minister. "It proves that some of you are human enough to see the humor of hanging a minister. Now let's all go home, or back to the Cheyenne, and let the sheriff handle this. Anyway, it is not a hanging matter. Vincent Roche is still alive."

The crowd mumbled and argued, but their ardor was dampened, and they followed the minister's advice.

"——!" snorted a disgusted voice. "I got the top-half of my ear shot off with a buckshot, and now I ain't goin' to git even with nobody. Preachers and civilization sure do rise —— with the country."

"And thus endeth that chapter," said Hashknife wearily, and they moved over to the door. "I thought it was goin' to be a reg'lar fight and it wasn't nothin' but a speech."

The minister had followed the crowd, without waiting for the sheriff to thank him.

"They won't come back again tonight," said the sheriff. "It was kind of a half-cocked proposition, anyway; but it might 'a' been bad pickin' if the preacher hadn't showed up. I'll have to build me a new door, I reckon."

"I'm goin' to have a talk with Cliff," said Hashknife. "You two stay here, in case they decide to come back."

He went through the connecting door and down to the cell, where Cliff stood behind the bars trying to find out what was going on.

"It's all over," said Hashknife. "The minister stopped 'em."

Cliff swore softly.

"The minister, eh? It's a —— of a wonder he didn't head the mob."

"Well, he sure done you a good turn. We couldn't 'a' stopped all of 'em. Now, I want to ask you a few questions, Cliff. You can lie, if yuh want to—but I hope yuh won't. What do you know about that jewelry store robbery?"

"Not a —— thing."

"Wrong answer. Remember, I carried yuh away from behind that store."

"All right."

"What was you doin' there?"

"I dunno."

"You ain't goin' to pass in yore studies, young feller."

"Oh, ——! What's all this about, anyway, Hartley? Who are you?"

"One of yore pa's hired men."

"You better stick with your job and let me alone."

"Thasso? You'll have to tell it to a judge. If yuh tell it to me first, I'll kinda figure it out, and between us we might be able to fool a jury."

"Figurin' that I'm guilty, eh?"

"Of bein' a hard-headed —— fool—yes."

Cliff was silent for several moments. Then:

"Vincent Roche was a friend of mine, Hartley. I never shot him."

"We was speakin' about that jewelry store hold-up."

"All right. I told you I didn't know anythin' about it, and I don't lie. I guess I was pretty drunk that night. I remember that the bartender at the Cheyenne told me I'd have delirium tremens, if I wasn't careful.

"I went to the Rodeo restaurant to eat. I can remember it a little. The food made me sick, and I went out the rear door. I remember that I sat down out there. There was a cool wind blowing and it made me feel good. I was kinda trembly all over and I wanted to lie down, but was afraid.

"I think I got up and tried to find my way back to the street, but I bumped into things. I was wandering around like a lost pup, when all to once I got a flash of light in my eyes, and something stung my face. I can kinda remember hearin' a gun go off, but I won't swear to that.

"Anyway, something or somebody bumped into me, almost knocking me down, and a moment later somethin' landed on my head. The next thing I remember was wakin' up in the bunkhouse at the ranch. It was like a fool dream—even the next mornin', when you made me ride into the hills. I did it, because I thought it was

part of a queer dream—somethin' I had to do."

"Yo're liable to git a di-plomy," said Hashknife softly. "Now, tell me about last night, Cliff. Did yuh leave there with Roche?"

"Yeah. I wasn't very drunk last night. Roche won a pile of money, but I didn't play, 'cause I was broke. We rode away together, late last night. We talked things over and he gave me a wad of money. He kinda blamed himself for me bein' broke; so he gave me a poker stake."

"That was it, eh?" Hashknife nodded slowly. It was dark in there, but Hashknife did not need to see Cliff's face to know he was telling the truth.

"Where did you leave Roche?"

"Where the road forks. We talked a few minutes. He asked me to sober up and behave myself. I—I told him I would."

"Will yuh, Cliff?"

"I was goin' to. Now, I dunno what'll happen."

"Ain't nothin' goin' to happen. Your story might not be much good in court, but it's good with me."

"Dad thinks I'm guilty."

"What about Milly?"

"Prob'ly."

"Does Miss Clement know?"

"Part of it. She thinks that I turned her down for another girl."

"Didn't yuh, Cliff?"

"By ——, I reckon I tried to, Hartley. Oh, I'm no good. I've rode 'em wild for the last few months, and I'm right where a lot of folks said I'd be. I had a start—once. Dad helped me out. He's a good old dad. Milly's a peach. But I don't know why I act like I have. Mebbe I'm a throw-back."

"Are yuh still engaged to Miss Clement?"

"I—I don't know. Not if she's got good sense."

"She prob'ly hasn't. Girls are kinda funny thataway—about fellers they like a lot."

"Well, I'm sorry. I want to thank yuh for blockin' my draw tonight. I suppose I might have killed Buck. And they'd 'a' hung me, if you hadn't rushed me out. Oh, I was sore at yuh, Hartley. But bein' here behind these bars, with a drunken mob wantin' to hang me—well, I kinda seen things different."

"If yuh get out of this mess—will yuh be good?"

"Well," Cliff hesitated for a moment, "I dunno. Human nature is a queer thing, Hartley. I don't want to lie to you; so I'll just say that, lookin' at it now, I sure as —— will. Once I get outside—I dunno."

"I'm glad yo're a human bein'," said Hashknife slowly. "I like folks that know somethin' about themselves. So many men only know what they can see of themselves in a mirror. They never get deeper into their own mind than the root of their hair. You set down and enjoy yore surroundin's, while I try to find out a few things."

"You'll tell 'em—at the ranch, won't yuh?"

"They'll have to know, Cliff."

"Well, you tell 'em, Hartley. They'll believe you."

Hashknife went back to the front office, where Sleepy and the sheriff were repairing the front door.

"What did yuh find out?" asked the sheriff.

"Quite a lot," said Hashknife. "Let me take that card yuh found on Roche, will yuh?"

"Y'betcha." The sheriff gave him the card. "What good will the card do yuh, Hartley?"

"I dunno. C'mon, Sleepy. We'll see yuh later, Farley."

THEY crossed the street to the Cheyenne and went inside. The place was thronged with cattlemen. Many of them knew that Hashknife and Sleepy had been with the sheriff, but bore them no ill-will. In the gambling room they found Slim Cole, who greeted them with an expansive grin.

"The preacher sure saved you jiggers," he declared.

"We appreciate that part of it," replied Hashknife. "It was a fool idea, Slim. Whisky makes a mob forget that they're human. But even if the preacher hadn't showed up, there would have been plenty of crape hangin' to Thunder County doorknobs tomorrow."

"And that's no dream," agreed Slim slowly. "Well, I suppose they'll let the law make the rest of the mistakes."

"You don't think that Cliff is guilty?"

"Do you?"

Hashknife grinned and took a playing card from his vest pocket.

"Do you use this brand in here, Slim?"

Slim squinted at the card, examined it closely and shook his head.

"Nope, we don't use 'em. That's a high-grade card, Hartley. No gamblin' house ever furnishes them kind."

"How about this one?" Hashknife handed him the card which had been found on Vincent Roche.

"That's the kind we use," nodded Slim.

Hashknife pocketed the cards and looked around the room. In the dance-hall the orchestra was playing furiously, while half-drunk cowpunchers swung dizzily through the rapid-fire two-step.

"Is the Countess in there?" asked Hashknife.

Slim grinned widely, as he shook his head.

"She ain't, Hartley. But if yuh really want to know where she is, I'll impart the information that she's down at the doctor's place."

"Interested in Roche, eh?"

"Well," grinned Slim, "it might be the old doctor. He's past sixty and homely as ——; but yuh can't tell nothin' 'bout the Countess. She sure does switch brands often."

"How's our friend Blackie Dahl?"

"That reptile!" Slim looked around. "He was here about the time the mob decided to rub yuh out, but he ain't been in since."

Slim moved away to a group around a faro game.

"You stick around here, Sleepy," said Hashknife. "I'm goin' down to see how Roche is comin' along."

"Oh, yeah?" Sleepy was a trifle sarcastic. "Well, just remember the little birdies, Hashknife."

Hashknife grinned and elbowed his way through the mob. The doctor's house was on the outskirts of the town, tucked away in a clump of stunted cottonwoods. As he went through the gate and started up the narrow walk, the door opened and the Countess came out. She was dressed in black, with the exception of a filmy white scarf.

She recognized Hashknife in the light from a window.

"Good evening, Mr. Hartley," she said softly.

"Howdy, ma'am,"

"You were going to see the doctor?"

"No-o-o, I reckon I was comin' to see you."

"To see me? How flattering! Really, I never expected to have you coming to see me."

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing, you seem too sensible."

"I'm much obliged," laughed Hashknife. "I wish Sleepy could hear yuh say that. Sleepy thinks I'm the big he-fool of 'em all."

"No," she said slowly, "you are not a fool, Mr. Man."

"But I'm liable to be—most any time, ma'am."

They moved down closer to the gate in the heavy shadows of the cottonwoods, where they leaned against the fence. From there they could hear the Cheyenne orchestra, the music softened by distance. Somewhere a half-drunk cowboy was trying to sing.

"Why did you wish to see me?" asked the Countess.

"To tell yuh a few things, ma'am. You'll prob'ly tell me that it ain't none of my busine... Mebbe it ain't. The fact is, I can't mind my own business. You know what happened tonight, don'tcha?"

"The arrest of Cliff Parker—yes."

"I work for his dad. He's a fine old man. Cliff's got a sister that's awful nice and sweet, ma'am. She's as game as they make 'em. And then there's a little lady who came here to marry Cliff. She's out there at the Maverick ranch, cryin' her eyes out.

"She don't know that Cliff is suspected of bein' a criminal, but she does know that Cliff got stuck on a girl here in town, and she thinks he don't care for her no more."

The Countess was silent for a while. Then she put her hand on Hashknife's arm.

"Oh, I'm sorry about that," she said softly. "Awful sorry."

"And there's Milly—the sister. Yuh see, her and Vincent Roche was kinda engaged, I reckon. She found out that Vincent Roche was kinda takin' a lot of interest in some girl in town, too."

"Vincent Roche." The Countess spoke softly. "Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Man. I didn't know, don't you see?"

"Yeah, I see. But bein' sorry don't help 'em out. I'm not blamin' you. Good gosh, it's all in yore business. But I

thought I'd kinda let yuh know about it, ma'am."

"Do you blame them—Cliff Parker and Vincent Roche?" There was a hint of laughter in her voice. Hashknife shifted uneasily.

"Well, I s'pose not," he faltered. "I dunno just what to say, in a case like this. They're human, ma'am."

"And being human, they fall from grace and into love with a dance-hall jade."

"Somethin' like that, I s'pose. Still, you didn't keep 'em trailin' yuh forever." Hashknife laughed softly. "You kinda look 'em over, don'tcha? I was just wonderin' if yo're lookin' for a certain kind of a person, and discardin' them that don't measure up to what yuh want."

"Perhaps." She laughed softly. "Who knows? I may have designs on you."

"No-o-o, I don't reckon yuh have, ma'am. I ain't worth investigatin'. The fact of the matter is, yuh can look right at me and tell what I am."

"Perhaps I have."

"Well, that's good. Yuh saw a homely, long-legged puncher, who don't amount to anythin', and decided to let him alone. I looked at you and seen a new type of dance-hall girl. But honest Injun, ma'am, yuh hadn't ought to waste yore voice in a place like the Cheyenne. Yo're young, pretty, and you've sure got one dinger of a voice."

"Do you like to hear me sing, Mr. Man?"

"Somethin' like that song yuh sung the first day I seen yuh."

" 'The Sweetest Story Ever Told' ?"

"I dunno the name—but it sure was sweet. Well, I reckon I've taken up enough of yore time. If yuh don't get back to the Cheyenne you'll be losin' yore job."

"I suppose so." Her voice was a trifle weary. "Was this all you wanted to tell me? Just warn me to keep away from Cliff and Vincent?"

"Not warn yuh, ma'am. Lord love yuh, that's yore business. I just wanted to tell yuh what it means to others. If you don't want 'em—I know who does."

The Countess laughed and moved through the gate,

"Then you have no interest beyond trying to help your friends?"

"Ain't that enough interest, ma'am?"

"Yes, I think that is enough. Do you believe that Cliff shot Vincent?"

"I know danged well he didn't."

"Then who did?"

"Remains to be seen, as the undertaker said."

A rider was coming toward them from the rear of the south side of town, a shapeless blot in the dark, traveling slowly. It appeared that he was coming to the doctor's home, but swung north and passed them. It was impossible to distinguish the color of the horse. The blot faded into the night, with only the soft thud of slow moving hoofs and the creak of saddle-leather to tell of its passing.

"Some cowpuncher goin' home," said Hashknife softly.

"It is wonderful here at night," said the Countess. "The day brings out nature at her worst. It is like turning a spotlight onto the face of a miser. But at night, under the blue of the moonlight, or under the yellow lamp-light, the roughness is all gone, like an out-of-focus picture. I hate reality, but love mystery, the moonlight, blurred figures.

"I have watched them ride into town, a blotch of ink-like, shapeless things, which blends with more blots at the hitch-racks. Then they come clumping along on foot toward the lighted windows, which throw long, grotesque shadows behind them, until they suddenly take the shape of men under the lights. Then the mystery is gone. They are only human beings, laughing, talking, swearing in their friendly way. But I would rather see them in the night, goblin-like hulks, with their spur-chains rattling, saddles creaking."

"I like it thataway," said Hashknife softly. "I like the camp-fire in the hills, cattle trailin' along in the moonlight, when the world is all silver and blue. Why, ma'am, even the bark of a coyote sounds like a welcome to me."

"I love it, too, Mr. Man. It seems that we love the same things, doesn't it?"

"Well," said Hashknife slowly, "I wouldn't go quite that far, ma'am. Yuh see, I ain't got much use for Blackie Dahl."

For a moment the Countess was silent, and then she laughed chokingly, almost hysterically. It was quite a while before she recovered her composure.

"I think I will go now," she said, trying to keep the laughter out of her voice. "I don't know whether you meant that or not—but it sounded like it. Good-by, Mr. Man."

She went swiftly back toward the street, while Hashknife leaned on the gate and watched her disappear. He grinned to himself, as he rolled a cigaret.

"Birdies singin'?" he muttered to himself. "No-o-o, I don't think so. But she's danged nice—too nice to be singin' songs in a honkatonk and mixin' with folks like Blackie Dahl."

He turned away from the gate and started toward the house, but stopped. Another horse and rider went pounding past, but this one was going in the opposite direction, and going fast. The cottonwoods obscured his view now, but as the rider swept past he was sure he caught a glimpse of something white. It was only a flash. He was unable to distinguish shapes, but he knew it was a horse and rider. The pounding hoofs died away in the distance.

"Somebody in a hurry," he reflected, as he knocked on the doctor's door.

The doctor answered the knock. He was a little old man with partly bald head and spectacles. Hashknife had never seen him before, and did not waste time in introductions.

"I just wanted to find out how Roche is gettin' along?"

"Well," the doctor hesitated. "He's doing better than I expected, but he is still unconscious."

"Do yuh think he'll get well?"

"As long as he's alive he has a chance."

"Didja get the bullets out of him?"

"There were no bullets in him."

"Went plumb through, eh?"

"Yes. Rather a small caliber bullet, I suppose."

"I see. Well," Hashknife turned away, "I'm much obliged, doctor."

"You are welcome."

HASHKNIFE walked back toward the street, thinking things over. It was evident that Vincent Roche had been shot with a rifle. The average small caliber six-shooter, using black powder and an all-lead bullet, would hardly pass entirely through the body of a man, except in rare cases. And it would be too much of a coincidence for two of them to do so in succession.

He went back to the Cheyenne and joined Sleepy, who had been losing a few dollars on a roulette wheel. The crowd was fairly orderly. Buck Hardy had sobered enough to hate himself for what he had done, and was moping around, trying to square himself.

Hashknife stood in the entrance to the dance-hall for half an hour, but did not manage to see the Countess. Sleepy knew what Hashknife was looking for, and it amused him greatly.

"The tall feller is lookin' for the fairy lady," he told Slim Cole, loud enough for Hashknife to hear.

Slim laughed.

"They all fall for her, Sleepy. She's a heart-breaker. The last time I seen Blackie Dahl he was eatin' a handful of spikes. I'm tellin' yuh she's a hoodoo. There's Cliff Parker in jail, Vint Roche in the hospital, and Blackie Dahl filin' his teeth, like a cannibal gettin' ready to eat 'em raw."

But Hashknife merely grinned easily and let them joke at his expense. It was about an hour later that Hashknife saw Blackie Dahl in the gambling room. He was playing the roulette wheel, his sombrero tilted low over his eyes, a set grin on his lips.

And Hashknife grinned as he thought of how the Countess had laughed at his insinuation that she loved Blackie Dahl. He was not a lovable character. Several times he lifted his head and squinted at Sleepy who was watching the play. He had never paid any attention to Sleepy since the day Sleepy had shot the gun out of his hand; but Sleepy knew that Blackie had not forgotten the incident.

Someone touched Hashknife on the arm, and he turned to see the sheriff, who beckoned him to follow. They went outside and walked away from the doorway.

"I've got somethin' for yuh, Hartley," said the sheriff, as he handed something to Hashknife. Hashknife stepped back to the light from the window and squinted at another trey of spades. It was another of the expensive brand.

"Where did yuh find this?" queried Hashknife.

The sheriff laughed shortly and put the card in his pocket,

"The man that left that card took the fastest horse in the Thunder country, Hartley."

"Yore horse, Jud?"

"Yeah—my black horse. I don't use him much. Kept him in the stable with my other bronc and Buck's roan. He

could run a mile while our other horses were just thinkin' about startin'. A while ago I went out to feed 'em. The black was gone, and stickin' to the feed-box was this —— card."

"When did yuh see the black horse last?"

"This afternoon."

"Hm-m-m!" Hashknife was thinking of the two riders, who had passed him, going in opposite directions. The first one had come from toward the sheriff's barn, which was located behind the office and jail building.

"Somebody is expectin' to travel like ——," said the sheriff sadly. "That animal was worth a thousand dollars of any man's money."

"Mebbe the Trey of Spades is thinkin' it's about time to hit the grit, Jud."

"Well, he picked somethin' to hit it with."

They went back into the saloon and joined Slim at the bar. The sheriff did not mention the stolen horse. In a few minutes Sufferin' Stockton came to Slim and drew him aside. After a short conversation Slim came back to the bar.

"I was just wonderin' what became of the Countess," he said, as he filled his glass. "She went down to the doctor's home quite a while ago. I sent Sufferin' down there, but she left there early. She ain't in the house nor in her room."

"That's kinda funny," remarked the sheriff.

"The doctor told Sufferin' that a strange man came there shortly after she went away."

"That was me," said Hashknife. "I talked with her. She was just startin' back."

"Aw, she'll show up," assured the sheriff. "So danged many things happen these days that we're lookin' for trouble."

As they turned away from the bar, Blackie Dahl walked past them and went outside. Hashknife sauntered over to the door, and in a minute or two Blackie rode past the saloon, seemingly in a hurry.

Hashknife found Sleepy in the dance-hall and they sat down at a table.

"I've been waitin' for the Countess to sing a song," said Sleepy grinning, "but she ain't showed up yet."

"Somebody stole the sheriff's race horse," said Hashknife. "They left the trey of spades."

"Another one?" Sleepy leaned his elbows on the table and squinted at Hashknife. "Comin' kinda fast, ain't they?"

"Too fast. It looks like a getaway, Sleepy. Farley says that the black horse can outrun anythin' in the country. The Countess left the doctor's house about fifteen minutes after I left you—and she ain't never showed up since."

"Tha'sso? This is gettin' interestin', Hashknife. Do yuh think she's connected in any way with the Trey of Spades?"

"I hate to think so. We were standin' at the gate down at the doctor's house, when somebody rode past, comin' from the general direction of the sheriff's stable. It was too dark to see who it was. They were sure goin' careful-like.

"A few minutes later another rider goes past me, travelin' in the opposite direction, but this one was just hittin' the highspots. It might have been the same rider, but whoever it was, they sure went away spinnin' like a spike."

"Went past you?" queried Sleepy. "Wasn't the Countess with yuh?"

"Not when the last one went past. She had started for here."

Farley came into the hall and headed for their table, where he took a seat.

"They've looked all around for that girl," he said slowly. "None of the girls have seen her."

"What do you think about her?" asked Sleepy.

"In what way, Stevens?"

"Think she's mixed up with the Trey of Spades?"

"Huh!" Farley scowled thoughtfully. "I never thought of her in that way. I wonder if that horse of mine——?"

Hashknife interrupted him to speak about the two riders he had seen.

"By ——, I'll bet that's it!" said Farley emphatically. "She left you in time to meet him."

"But it was only one rider, Farley."

"And if it was her—why do they make their getaway now. We don't know who the Trey of Spades is," said Sleepy. "Their game is just as good as ever."

"But, if Roche dies, they're facin' a noose," argued Farley.

Hashknife shook his head.

"I don't *sabe* it, Farley. Why did the Trey of Spades try to fasten the crime onto Cliff Parker? Cliff and Roche rode away

from town that night together. They parted at the fork of the road."

"And that's where Roche was found the next mornin'."

"Yeah, that's true," agreed Hashknife. "But did you notice Roche's saddle? It was all gummed up with blood, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, it sure was."

"Would a man spill that much blood before he could fall off his horse? Roche was hit hard enough to knock him plumb out of the saddle. I tell yuh, he was shot quite a long ways from the fork of the road, and they packed him back there on his horse. They stole his money and left him there, with a trey of spades stickin' in his vest."

"Well, that don't mean anythin' to me, Hartley."

"All right," grinned Hashknife. "It only means to me that whoever did that job knew that Cliff and Roche rode away together that night. And the Trey of Spades—well, look at it thisaway, Jud: If the Trey of Spades wanted to throw suspicion of his crimes onto somebody else, he wouldn't leave his trademark on every job."

"Then you don't think that the Trey of Spades shot Vincent Roche?"

"One of 'em did."

"You mean—do you think there's more than one?"

Hashknife smiled softly and began rolling a cigaret.

"Mebbe you're right," mused the sheriff. "I never thought of such a thing before. How about that jewelry store robbery?"

Hashknife scratched a match and puffed thoughtfully.

"That's one thing that convinces me that the Trey of Spades did not shoot Vincent Roche. You found Cliff Parker's hat out in that back yard, Jud. It was danged good evidence, wasn't it?"

The sheriff nodded quickly.

"I could almost get a conviction on that hat."

"And," grinned Hashknife, "to keep Cliff Parker from stealin' his glory, the Trey of Spades stole the hat from you, Jud."

"You mean to say that he stole the hat to keep Cliff from bein' arrested?"

"Just exactly."

"Mebbe," Jud wasn't exactly convinced. "I had the idea that one of you fellers took the hat. You done yore dangdest to keep what you knew under cover. You found Cliff there, didn't yuh?"

"Sure we did," Hashknife grinned widely. "If we hadn't he'd be in the penitentiary right now. My gosh, everythin' was agin' him."

"He ought to thank yuh," said Jud. "I was sure he pulled that job."

"He saved the jewelry, Jud. The Trey of Spades bumped into him and scattered the loot all over. I reckon he bent his gun over Cliff's head, thinkin' Cliff was tryin' to stop him."

Farley nodded and got to his feet,

"I've got to keep movin'," he said. "I'm gettin' as nervous as an old lady."

He moved across the dance-hall, dodging the dancers, and Sleepy turned to Hashknife.

"What about that string of pearls we found in Cliff's pocket?".

"Oh, yeah. I forgot about them, Sleepy. Let's go across to the store and get some tobacco."

They crossed the street and went into a general store. There were a number of men in there, swapping lies. Hashknife bought some tobacco and cigaret papers.

"You got any high-power rifle ca'tridges, with solid jackets?" he asked the clerk.

"Nope. Nobody uses 'em here. I've got plenty thirty-thirties, with soft-noses, and some thirty-forties, same bullet."

"Do yuh know anybody around here that might have some?"

"Nope, I don't."

"What was that?" One of the bystanders, a long-nosed person, wanted to be of assistance.

"High-power cartridges," said the clerk. "Them solid pointed ones."

"Oh! Nope, I dunno anybody what uses 'em. Ol' Pete Duncan used to have one of them there Mow-zers. I reckon he had some."

"Where could I find him?" asked Hashknife.

"Well—" the long-nosed one grinned slightly—"that's kinda hard t' tell, stranger. Ol' Pete went t' New Mexico 'bout three year ago, and died of tick-del-aroo; so it's kinda hard for t' give yuh his address."

Hashknife thanked him gravely and they went back to the Cheyenne.

"What kind of a —— disease did old Pete Duncan die of?" asked Sleepy.

"Tic douloureux," laughed Hashknife.

"Didn't yuh ever hear that name before? It's neuralgia of the face, I think. Prob'ly he died of a sore head. A lot of the old timers used that name for mostly every disease. It sounds like a lot, don't it?"

"It sure does."

A few minutes later they ran into Buck Hardy, and he drew them aside to impart the information that the sheriff had released Cliff Parker.

"I reckon Jud knows what he's doin'," said Buck. "Yuh see, he never did arrest Cliff."

"Where's Cliff now?" queried Hashknife.

"Gone home, I reckon. Jud was afraid somebody might take exception to seein' Cliff runnin' loose; so Jud went with him to get his horse. By golly, I came —— near gittin' Cliff lynched, didn't I? That's what liquor does to a feller. I'm all through with that stuff, y'betcha."

"The preacher kinda saved yuh," laughed Hashknife.

"Dang right he did. He sure helped everybody, and I'll betcha he has a crowd to his church tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?"

"Yeah. The place is all fixed up fine now. He sure worked hard to get it fixed. The ghost of the old Chuck Luck Saloon will sure turn over in its grave tomorrow."

Farley came in and joined them.

"Buck told yuh, didn't he?" he asked.

"Yeah," smiled Hashknife. "Some of 'em will likely yelp about it, but it was about all yuh could do. Did he go home?"

"Well, he started home. Let's have a drink."

They went over to the bar and made known their wants.

"Give me whisky," said Buck seriously. "When yo're quittin' liquor, whisky is the best stuff to taper off on."

Slim Cole joined them and Hashknife asked him about the Countess.

"Can't find her," said Slim shaking his head. "I tell yuh, I'm worried about that girl. Somethin' must 'a' happened to her."

"What could happen to her?" asked the sheriff. "Things don't usually happen to a dance-hall girl."

Slim's lips formed an angry reply, but he turned away and walked across into the gambling room."

"Mebbe he was stuck on her, too," whispered Buck.

"Funnier things than that have happened," said Hashknife dryly, and Sleepy grinned knowingly.

They drifted away from the bar and watched the play in the gambling room, which was growing heavier all the time. Cowboys swore feelingly, as their month's wages were swept away in a few turns of the wheel or the turn of a card. Some of them were fortunate enough to keep ahead of the game, but few were able to stand prosperity and strewed their money recklessly; talking at the top of their voices to no one in particular, and laughing at their own witty remarks.

"Well, shall we go home?" asked Hashknife.

"Might as well," Sleepy yawned widely. "I could use a little sleep."

Just outside the door they found the sheriff and another man, talking earnestly. The sheriff turned to Hashknife.

"This is Jack Woods, the depot agent, Hartley. He says that the passenger train left Silverbend an hour and a half ago and ain't showed up yet. It don't take over forty minutes for the run."

"And the wires are dead," added Woods. "Went dead just after the train left Silverbend."

"Ain't much yuh can do, except to wait, is there?" asked Hashknife.

"Not much," agreed the sheriff. "Let's walk up to the depot."

They were nearly to the depot when they heard the far-away whistle of an engine.

"There she comes!" exclaimed Woods, increasing his pace. "We'll soon know what caused the delay."

THE headlight of the engine was in sight when they reached the platform. The train clanked in slowly and stopped with a decided jerk. Several men were standing in the open door of the express car, holding lanterns, and the conductor came hurrying from the rear of the train.

"Anything wrong?" asked Woods. The conductor lifted his lantern nervously.

"Oh, is that you, Woods? We were held up at Meteor Creek. Engineer shot. Got to get a doctor for him right away."

"This is the sheriff," said Woods quickly. "We were afraid something had happened. The line is cut between here and Silverbend."

"I'll go after the doctor," offered Sleepy, who went running down the street, while Hashknife and Farley climbed into the express car where the engineer was stretched out on a cot groaning with a broken right arm.

The through safe was lying on its side, door wide open, and there was a strong odor of dynamite in the car. Passengers were unloading from the train and walking about the platform.

"Tell me about it," said the sheriff.

"It was a one-man job," said the conductor, placing his lantern on the wrecked safe. "He flagged us down with a red lantern on the far side of the Meteor Creek bridge, and he was into the cab before the engine crew realized what it was all about.

"He took them back and uncoupled the express car. I had swung down to see what was the trouble, and he drove me back with a couple of shots. Then he made the crew pull the express car over the bridge and up the line two miles. Oh, he knew his business.

"He threatened to dynamite the door of the express car; so the messenger let him in, and he made them all look on while he loaded the safe with dynamite. The engineer made an attempt to stop him and got a bullet in his arm. It took nerve, I'll tell you."

"How much money did he get?" asked the sheriff.

"That's hard to tell."

"Enough," said the messenger shortly.

"This side of Meteor bridge, eh?" grunted the sheriff. "He probably had his horse planted there."

"Yore horse," corrected Hashknife.

"Yeah, my horse, I reckon. And there ain't a bronc in this doggone range that could catch him. There ain't a bit of use goin' out there. He knew where he was goin' when he left that train—and we don't."

"Better wait until mornin'," agreed Hashknife.

Sleepy arrived with the doctor, who had the injured man removed to the waiting-room of the depot.

"Well, he didn't leave his card," observed Sleepy, as he and Hashknife went back to the hitch-racks after their horses.

"That's right, nobody mentioned the trey of spades." Hashknife started to mount his horse, but hesitated and handed the reins to Sleepy.

"Wait here a minute."

He went into the Cheyenne and found Sufferin' Stockton, who had just left his game to get some supper.

"Sufferin', did you ever know a gent by the name of Pete Duncan?"

"Old Pete Duncan? Sure did. He left here and went to Old Mexico and——"

"Died of a pain in his face," added Hashknife, grinning. "Where did he live around here?"

"D Bar ranch. He sold out to Blackie Dahl."

"Much obliged," said Hashknife, and bolted out of the place to join Sleepy. But instead of riding toward the Maverick ranch they swung out of town in the opposite direction and took the road which led to the east.

"You ain't turned around, are yuh?" queried Sleepy.

"Not yet. I'm just beginnin' to get straightened out."

Hashknife glanced at his watch. It was well past midnight. A moon poked itself over the crest of the Thunder mountains and lighted up the yellow ribbon of road ahead of them.

"I'm glad there's a little light on the subject," stated Sleepy peevishly. "Either you think I'm a mind-reader, or yuh want to keep me plumb ignorant. I'll betcha yo're afraid you've made a mistake, and that I'll laugh at yuh, if yuh have."

"I'm lookin' for somethin', Sleepy."

"The —— yuh are! By golly, I thought yuh was just takin' a ride. Well, that makes it better and relieves my mind quite a lot."

Hashknife laughed, but did not enlighten Sleepy, who knew that Hashknife was not in the habit of talking about what he was going to do. It was a strange road to both of them, but they knew that it led to the D Bar ranch, which was about six miles from Oxbow.

"That old moon sure makes it nice for us," observed Hashknife, as they galloped along over the dusty road.

"Yeah? Is this a six-shooter mission, Hashknife?"

"Yuh never can tell, Sleepy."

"Well, it's somethin'—to know that much about it."

The road swung farther into the hills,

going onto the higher ground, as they neared the D Bar ranch. A right-hand curve brought them out onto the brow of a hill, where they could see the outlines of the ranch buildings below and to the left of them.

They drew up their horses and dismounted.

"Drops us below the skyline," observed Hashknife, as he squatted on his heels and began rolling a cigaret.

"There's a light in the house," said Sleepy. "That's Blackie Dahl's place, ain't it?"

"Must be. Mebbe we better move closer and find out what's keepin' him up so late."

"Yo're the general of this army, Hashknife."

Hashknife laughed and straightened up. "We'll walk in from here, Sleepy. It ain't far, and we can keep kinda under cover thataway."

They tied the horses just off the road and went down through the sage brush toward the ranch house. The light had disappeared now, as they made a cautious advance. They were almost to the tumbledown fence, which partly enclosed the ranch house, when Hashknife grasped Sleepy by the arm.

A rider, leading a horse, had appeared from around behind the house and was heading northwest. It was not light enough to distinguish colors, but it was light enough to show that there were two horses and one rider.

"Whoever that is, he's takin' a pack-horse along," declared Hashknife. "Can'tcha see the pack on the rear animal?"

"Plenty plain," grunted Sleepy. "I'll betcha that's Blackie Dahl, and he's makin' his getaway."

"Looks like it, sure enough. C'mon."

They trotted over to the house and looked around. The rider had disappeared in the hills. Hashknife knocked on the front door with the barrel of his gun, but no one answered. Cautiously he tried the knob and found the door unlocked.

They went inside and found a small oil lamp on the table. Hashknife scratched a match and touched it to the wick. The weak illumination showed them a dirty, disordered room; smelling strongly of liquor and grease. The table was littered with dirty dishes, the rusty stove was gobby from spilled food. But Hashknife paid little attention to the room, as he carried the lamp from place to place, searching. On a crude mantel he found some empty cartridge shells, which he examined and showed to Sleepy.

"A feller down at the store would call 'em 'Mow-zers'," grinned Hashknife. "I had a hunch that we'd find a Mauser here, but it ain't here. Vincent Roche was shot with a high-power gun, shootin' solid-point bullets."

After a final inspection, Hashknife blew out the lamp and led the way outside.

"We'll get our broncs and see if we can catch sight of that jigger and his pack-horse, Sleepy. I've an idea he's the feller we're lookin' for, and he won't travel so awful fast."

"I'll foller yuh blindly," complained Sleepy, as they panted back up the slope to their horses. "I'll betcha you ain't got no —— of a fine idea where we're goin', nor what we're liable to find."

"You'd win," laughed Hashknife.

"And that pack-horse sure shows that somebody is pullin' out for a good long stay, Hashknife."

"Longer than that—mebbe. C'mon. We've got to keep off the ridges, cowboy; so peel the old eye ahead."

AND while Hashknife and Sleepy rode through the moonlit hills, trying to catch sight of the rider ahead of them, Dad Parker and Cliff sat on the front porch of the Maverick ranch house, talking seriously. Cliff had told them of the attempt to lynch him. Making a clean breast of it, he told Milly and Dorothy of the many things that had happened to him; of how, in a drunken haze, he had bumped into the jewelry store robbery, and of how Hashknife and Sleepy had saved him. He did not spare himself.

"I'm not out of the woods yet," he told them. "Until the real Trey of Spades is caught—I'm liable to be it. The sheriff had my hat. He still thinks that Hashknife or Sleepy stole it from him, but they swear they didn't."

"Where is their interest in it all?" asked Milly.

"I think they're detectives. Vincent thinks they are, too. They may be Government agents. You know, the Trey of Spades stole registered mail, and Uncle Sam

don't lie down and let a mail robbery go unnoticed."

Dorothy listened silently to it all. Then:

"You were not in the hills the night I came, Cliff?"

"No. I was rolled up in a blanket, with my hands and feet tied and a gag in my mouth; and you rested your feet on me all the way home that night. I didn't know much about it. I had been hit pretty hard, and I was soaked with whisky to begin with."

"You girls better sleep over it," advised Dad Parker. "It looks worse now than it will in the mornin'. We're goin' to church tomorrow afternoon."

"I'm going to town right now," declared Milly. "Vint needs me. Whether he is right or wrong, I'm going. Will you go with me, Cliff?"

"Sure thing."

"We'll hitch up the team," said Dad Parker slowly, "and all go. I'll wake Harmony and tell him that——"

"Who's this comin'?" wondered Cliff. Two men rode into the ranch and came straight up to them.

"Howdy, folks," called one of them.

"It's Franklin, of the Diamond V," said Cliff. "How are yuh, Frank?"

"Travelin' in good company, too," laughed Franklin. "Brought the minister with me."

"The minister?" said Dad wonderingly.

"Yes, the minister," laughed the Reverend Mr. Jones, dismounting. "This is a queer time to come calling, isn't it?"

"What brings you here?" asked Dad.

"It appears that a lady is missing," explained the minister. "She is a singer in the Cheyenne dance-hall. There seems to be considerable apprehension over her absence. Mr. Cole organized sort of a search party, but she is not to be found in Oxbow.

"A number of the boys volunteered to make a search of the surrounding country, and I offered my services; so Mr. Franklin and myself came in this direction."

"The Countess missing?" queried Cliff.

"That's her," said Franklin. "Where are them two punchers that's workin' here?"

"They're in Oxbow," said Cliff.

"They pulled out for home quite a while ago. Right after the train robbery."

"Train robbery?"

"Didn't yuh know about that?" asked Franklin. He told them about the robbery—or what he knew of it.

"Well," laughed Cliff, "they can't blame me for that. If it hadn't been for the preacher, I'd be danglin' on a rope now."

"Yuh sure would," agreed Franklin. "It was an awful fizzle."

"Mebbe not," said Cliff dryly. "Farley had Hartley and Stevens in there with him. You fellers got off lucky."

"They seem like a nice pair of fellows," said the minister.

"You don't know half of it," said Cliff. "If I was the Trey of Spades I'd sure high-tail it out of here."

"What do yuh mean by that?" asked Franklin.

"Well," laughed Cliff, "Dad thought he hired a pair of cowpunchers."

"Thought he did?"

"Yeah. Mebbe the Trey of Spades thought so, too. I'll go down and hitch up that team, Dad."

"Did Cliff mean that them two fellers are detectives?" asked Franklin.

"He seems to think so," replied Dad.

"Are you going to town?" asked the minister.

"Yes. We were coming in tomorrow to church—or rather today—but Milly is anxious to see Vincent Roche."

"We might as well be movin'," said Franklin. "That bronc of yours needs plenty of time to go anywhere, Jones."

The minister laughed shortly and mounted.

"We'll see you at church," called Dad.

"Not me—yuh won't," called back Franklin, as they rode away back toward Oxbow.

"Why won't you come to church?" asked the minister, after a long period of silence.

"Don't care for it, that's why."

"Don't believe in it?"

"Mebbe not."

"Franklin, who do you think shot Vincent Roche?"

"Who?" Franklin laughed hoarsely, as he swung his horse in closer to the minister. "Who do I think shot him? Listen to me you —— sneak! I know you. Preacher ——! You ride too well, and you've got a six-gun under yore vest. —— you, I don't know what you know, but I hate a —— detective!"

As Franklin snapped out his last sentence

he fired his gun almost against the minister. The two horses whirled wildly at the crash of the heavy revolver, and the minister went headlong to the ground, sparks of fire drifting from his clothes where the powder had ignited them.

Franklin jerked his horse under control and spurred back to where the minister lay, a blacker blot in the shadow of the sage. The gray horse had only gone a short distance away.

The minister had fallen far enough away from the road to be invisible at night. Franklin looked cautiously around, as if debating what to do next. Then he rode out to the gray horse, caught the reins and led it further back against the hills, after which he spurred on toward Oxbow.

And Franklin might have been surprised to see the minister get to his feet, brush the dust off his black suit and move away from the road, while the wagon from the Maverick ranch went past.

"That is the advantage of a shoulder holster," said the minister, half-aloud. "The bullet was fired almost against the gun. So it was Franklin, eh? The last man I would have suspected. Well, I suppose I shall have to walk to town."

And while the minister plodded along the dusty road in the moonlight, Sid Franklin rode into Oxbow, a potential two-time murderer, but with a feeling of security in his heart.

"It's too —— bad I didn't have a trey of spades to stick into his vest," he told himself. "By ——, it might not be a bad idea to do it after all."

He strode into the Cheyenne, with that idea in mind.

The crowd had thinned considerably, but there were still a few men playing the games. The floor was littered with cards; so Franklin waited his chance to pick up a trey of spades. In order to allay suspicion he picked up several more, and amused himself by spinning them across the room.

Finally he slipped one into his pocket and sauntered out of the place, stopping at the bar to find out whether any one had found the Countess—which they had not. Then he got his horse and rode furiously back to where he had left the minister.

At first he thought he had made a mistake in the place, but closer inspection showed that it was the right place, but the body was not there. For a long time he sat on his heels, his mind in a whirl. He had been an awful fool he was forced to admit.

He had virtually confessed to the shooting of Roche, and had failed to make sure that the minister's lips were sealed.

"Held the gun right agin' him, too," he told himself. He took the card out of his pocket and looked at it closely. Then he swore hoarsely and tore it into bits.

It was a joker! He had thrown away the wrong card.

"I've gotta keep under cover," he told himself. "And I've got to kill that —— detective before he can tell on me. I'll go to his shack and finish the job."

He rode swiftly back to Oxbow, tied his horse at a little-used rack, and made his way around to the minister's little shack, which was located some little distance from the center of town. He walked boldly to the door and knocked loudly, but there was no response.

"——!" swore Franklin. "He ain't got here yet. No wonder—I made him walk."

A light streak had appeared in the eastern sky, proclaiming that daylight was not far away. He noticed this and swore nervously. His future was not half as rosy as that sky was becoming. But still the minister did not put in an appearance. Finally he left the house and walked back to the street. He had made up his mind that there was only one thing for him to do, and that was—flight.

There were several men in front of the Cheyenne, which Franklin avoided. He did not want to waste time in idle words with any one, because time was worth money to him now. He passed between the Rodeo restaurant and the vacant building, walked around to the hitch-rack—and cursed bitterly.

His horse was gone.

AND while the Gods of Fate juggled with Sid Franklin's future, Hashknife and Sleepy rode higher into the hills, traveling over a strange country, following some one whom they knew not. Twice in an hour they had seen the rider and a led horse top the skyline of the hills, and they were sure that it was the same man they had seen leave the D Bar ranch.

He had swung in a quarter-circle, until

now he was heading almost west of Oxbow. They had traveled slowly.

"Goin' to be daylight pretty soon," observed Hashknife. "If he's makin' a getaway, he'll likely hole up at daylight and we'll have a chance to look him over."

They had crossed the railroad near the point where the train had been held-up, although they did not know it.

"I thought he was headin' for the main divide," said Hashknife, "but he's swingin' too far to the left now. There might be a pass over there, where he can go through, but my private idea is that he's huntin' a hole to crawl into."

"I hope he's been worth follerin'," said Sleepy. "If we've just been trailin' some prospector, I'll be kinda peevish."

Hashknife laughed shortly. It had been hard traveling. The hills were rather brushy, dry; which made it difficult for them to travel with any degree of silence.

Daylight swept away the haze and they found themselves on the slope of a timbered cañon. There was no sign of their quarry, although they sat there and studied the country for several minutes.

"We'll swing around the head of this cañon," suggested Hashknife, after studying the broken slope of the opposite side. "If that jigger knows this country, he wouldn't go down there."

They rode slowly along the rim, scrutinizing the depths, and were just about to swing back to higher ground, when Sleepy drew up his horse and pointed down through the timber.

"See it down there?" he asked, as Hashknife swung around and came back to him. "See that horse down there?"

"A black horse!" snorted Hashknife, and added: "In a brush corral. Whatcha know about that?"

He dropped off his horse and hunted for a better view.

"There's a shack down there, Sleepy!" He called softly from where he crouched on the rim of the cañon. "Yuh can't see it very plain, but it's there."

Together they studied the place. It was impossible to get a clear view of the shack, which was quite a little distance below the brush corral.

"We'll go further up the cañon and see if we can find a way to sneak down," said Hashknife. "I think our man is down there, and he's the jigger that took the sheriff's horse, I reckon."

"It won't take us long to find out," grinned Sleepy.

"If he ain't already seen us. We better go danged quiet."

They drew away from the rim, circled wide and came in at the upper end of the cañon, where it was possible to find a fairly easy slope down through the heavy brush.

SID FRANKLIN leaned on the hitch-rack for some time. He was both frightened and angry. Whether his horse had pulled away and gone home, or whether some one had stolen it, he had not the slightest idea. He could not remember whether he had tied the animal securely or not.

Finally he resolved to steal a horse from the Cheyenne rack and ride back to the Diamond V, where there were plenty of good horses. But he was destined to more disappointment. As he neared the rack, the sheriff, Buck Hardy and Cliff Parker came out of the saloon and saw him.

"Sid, I want yuh to go with us," said the sheriff. "Get yore horse right away and bring him around to the office."

"Huh!" Franklin debated swiftly. He had thought at first that the sheriff meant that he was under arrest, but now he knew that Farley wanted him to ride with the posse.

"Somebody stole my bronc," he said calmly. "I tied him to the rack around there a while ago, but he's gone."

"Did he leave his card?" asked Buck.

"Get yuh a horse at the livery-stable," ordered Farley. "Cliff has to get one, too. And then come down to the office and get yore rifles. Me and Buck will have everythin' ready."

Inside of fifteen minutes the four men rode away from the office and headed for the hills to the west of Meteor Creek. There was little conversation.

"No use huntin' for a trail," said Farley. "We'll just swing into the hills and see what we can see."

They rode for an hour, finally grouping on the crest of a high ridge, where Farley examined the country through a pair of field-glasses. Franklin was watchful, nervous. Farley replaced his glasses in a leather case and turned to Franklin.

"Sid, if you was goin' to hide out from the law in this country, where would yuh head for?"

Franklin grinned slightly and swallowed dryly.

"I dunno, Jud. I might head for the main divide, I s'pose. There's lots of hidin' places in these hills. How about that rocky cañon over there? The one where the creek sinks out of sight."

"I know which one yuh mean," said Cliff. "Vint Roche told me that there's a cabin back near the head of it."

"I know where it is," said Farley thoughtfully. "Old Pete Duncan built it. He had an idea of catchin' wild horse out there in the winter time, and he built it to live in. I never seen it, but old Pete told me the location."

"Well, let's go," said Buck. "I hope to gosh there's a bed in it, 'cause I'm asleep right now."

They moved ahead. Franklin's brow wrinkled in thought as he considered the thunder range, towering closer and closer. If the opportunity arose he was going to desert the posse and take chances on finding his way across that range and into a new country. He did not want to go back and face the minister.

Franklin had always born a fair reputation. He did not have a face that would inspire any great amount of confidence. But he had just enough imagination to picture hinself, standing on a breakaway platform, with a knotted rope tickling his ear. It was not a pleasant picture, and his face expressed his feelings.

"You must 'a' et somethin' that didn't set well, didn't yuh?" asked Buck, who was riding beside him.

"Too much Cheyenne hooch," said Franklin quickly. "It sure sours on yuh."

"You ought to quit it," said Buck. "I sure did."

"When?" queried Farley, looking back at him.

"Well, I'm taperin' off," corrected Buck.

"Yore taperin' off came danged near bein' my finish," declared Cliff. "If it hadn't been for the preacher, I'd be a ghost."

"Aw, that was before I quit," laughed Buck. "I sure pulled what you'd call a 'fox-pass' that time."

"And I never even thanked the preacher," laughed Cliff. "He was at the ranch about three o'clock this mornin' with Franklin. We should have brought him along—him and his race-horse."

Franklin spat dryly and looked away, while the rest of them laughed. Far away to the south of them, a rider was skirting the side of a ridge; just a moving speck in that world of sage.

Franklin called Farley's attention to him, and they stopped to use the glasses. For several moments the sheriff studied the spot, and handed the glasses to Franklin. One glance was enough for Franklin to know that it was his horse, but the distance was too great to identify the rider. He handed the glasses back to Farley.

"Recognize the animal?" queried Farley.

"It sure looks like mine," declared Franklin. "It's a red-roan, with a white face, and that's what mine looks like."

Farley used the glasses again, but the horse and rider had disappeared into a cañon.

"Goin' in the same direction as we are," said Farley. "We'll kinda edge in on him."

"Better edge in," agreed Buck, "or we'll miss that cañon."

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy tied their horses above the brush corral and worked their way silently down through the undergrowth. The tall black horse in the corral looked them over indifferently. It was a racy looking animal. Hanging to a snag near the corral was a saddle, with a loose rope dangling on the horn.

The cabin was well hidden in the brush, but the cover was heavy enough for them to come close without chance of being detected. They were almost to the corner of the cabin, when Hashknife grasped Sleepy by the arm and drew him down.

A rider was coming down the right hand side of the cañon, and was almost to the bottom. They dropped lower and waited for him to appear again. It seemed that he had stopped and was looking at the cabin. To the right of them was some down-timber and a tangle of brush, and Hashknife crossed swiftly to this with Sleepy on his heels.

This gave them a fairly good view of the front yard of the place, where two horses were standing. Both of them were saddled. On the ground was a blanket and a tarpaulin, thrown aside.

Then Blackie Dahl came from the cabin

door and went to one of the horses. He looked around at the left-hand rim of the cañon and back at the cabin. He seemed undecided what to do. Hashknife and Sleepy had forgotten the other man.

Blackie tested the cinch on his saddle and turned to go to the other horse, when he stopped suddenly, looking toward where the other rider had stopped. For several seconds he did not move. Then his hand jerked back to his holster, and his revolver shot crashed out in the stillness of the cañon.

His shot was echoed by another—and another. Blackie turned, reached for his horse, as if trying to support himself, and fell sprawling on his face.

He did not move. The two horses sidled away from him, looking down at their fallen master. One of them nuzzled at him and threw up its head to look at the man, who was coming toward them.

This man was walking quartering to Hashknife and Sleepy so they were unable to see his face. He was wearing a gray shirt, black sombrero, which seemed very new, and wore his overalls tucked into the tops of his high-heeled boots.

He went slowly up near Blackie and touched him with his toe, but Blackie did not move. Then he whirled quickly and went into the cabin. Hashknife grinned widely and started to his feet, but Sleepy drew him back. Riders were coming down over the left-hand rim of the cañon, fairly sliding their horses in their haste.

"Sheriff's posse!" exclaimed Hashknife. "Keep down."

The posse dismounted and deployed through the brush, advancing on the cabin. They were almost to the cabin, when the man came outside. He had his back to Hashknife and Sleepy, but the sheriff was plainly visible to them.

"What in —— are you doin' here?" demanded Farley. His voice was filled with wonder and anger.

The man did not speak, but his hands dropped to his sides.

"You dirty horse thief!" It was Sid Franklin's voice. "I've got you."

With an almost imperceptible motion the man drew and fired. A second later another shot crashed out, and the bullet whined off a rock on the side of the cañon.

"Don't move!" The man snapped his order. He had a gun in each hand now, and his hands were weaving back and forth, as he covered the posse.

"Drop your guns!" he snapped again. "Don't be a —— fool, like Blackie Dahl and Sid Franklin."

"I'll be ——!" exploded the sheriff, but obeyed.

Hashknife stepped out of his hiding place and began walking toward the man, his gun ready. The sheriff had dropped his rifle, and now reached slowly for his holster.

"Take 'em out easy," advised the man.

The sheriff laughed and leaned sidewise to get a better view of Hashknife.

"None of that!" warned the man. "I'm no fool."

"Look behind yuh," challenged the sheriff. "Yo're afraid to look behind yuh."

"Shut up, —— yuh!" The man was getting nervous. His arms tensed and his shoulders hunched slightly. He wanted to turn, but would not.

"Drop them six-shooters!" he snarled. "—— yuh, be quick."

And it was then that Hashknife bunched himself and dived into the man like a football player making a hard tackle. They went down, with Hashknife on top, while both guns fired into the dirt as they fell.

The attack had been so unlooked for that the man was completely at Hashknife's mercy, but he twisted over on his side and Hashknife looked down into the face of the Reverend Mr. Jones. The sheriff, Cliff and Buck were running to his assistance, while from the other direction came Sleepy, laughing joyfully.

"All right, —— yuh!" snarled the prisoner. "I'll behave."

They jerked him to a sitting position, while Buck got a lariat and secured him.

"If you've got a trey of spades I'll pin it onto yuh," offered Hashknife.

"Thank you, I'm all out of cards," said Jones.

"You killed Blackie Dahl?" asked Farley.

"Yeah, I killed him. Had to. He shot first."

"Well, what in —— was he doin' here? Who is the Trey of Spades? Who shot Vincent Roche?"

"Hey! C'mere!" Buck called from the doorway.

"Go ahead—I'll watch him," said Sleepy.

Hashknife and Farley went into the cabin where Buck pointed at a pile of blankets on the floor.

"For gosh sake! How did she get here?" exploded Farley.

It was the Countess, bedraggled, dishevelled, her face caked with blood, but with eyes that tried to smile and a mouth that trembled visibly. Hashknife knelt down beside her and peered into her face.

"Hello, Mr. Man." Her voice was not very strong.

"How did you get here?" repeated Farley wonderingly.

"Our friend, Mr. Dahl, furnished transportation." She tried to smile, but it was a dismal failure. "He met me last night, after I left you at the doctor's home, and I think he hit me with his gun. He is not very gentlemanly, you know.

"I don't remember much, except that he had me in a cabin. He didn't know that I was conscious. Anyway," she grimaced, "he packed me on a horse, just like a sack, and I nearly died. He had me roped on and brought me here. He thinks I'm dead. Yes, he does. I heard him say it out loud. He was going to leave me here."

"He won't never do it again'," said Hashknife softly. "He's all through doin' things like that."

"The preacher shot him," offered Buck.

"The Reverend Jones?"

"The Trey of Spades," corrected Hashknife softly.

A moment or two of silence, and then came the smashing report of a rifle. The men rushed to the doorway just in time to see Sleepy kick a rifle out of Franklin's hands. He had managed to get to his knees, but now he slid sidewise.

The pseudo preacher was lying on his face, arms outstretched.

"—— him!" wailed Sleepy. "He shot the prisoner!"

"The dirty spy!" Franklin managed to lift himself on one elbow. "He won't never have a chance to squeal on me. I—I'll bet his shoulder holster won't save him this time. Why, dang his soul——"

Franklin slid back dead.

Hashknife stepped over and turned the other man. He was barely conscious, but managed to smile. Hashknife lifted him up.

"Thanks," he whispered. "It's all right. Saves time. Most of the money is under the bunk in my shack. The express loot is—is tied to the cantle of my saddle. I—I stole that black horse for a swift getaway. Tell Cliff I'm sorry I had to hit him that night. It was dark. I stole that hat to save him.

"I thought that Blackie shot Roche, but it was Franklin. He admitted it to me. Thought I was a detective. I—I had to make my getaway today, because I couldn't preach. I'm sorry I—I fooled folks. They do need a preacher pretty bad."

"Why did you use the trey of spades?" asked Hashknife.

"Superstition. Treys have always been lucky for me. I—I stayed at it too long, I guess. I was afraid somebody might suffer for my trade-mark. You tell the Countess," he smiled up at Hashknife, "that she picked the wrong ones."

His head swayed forward and Hashknife laid him down.

"What did he mean—about the Countess pickin' the wrong ones?" asked Hashknife.

"I will tell you."

He turned and looked at the Countess, who was leaning against the door. She sighed and felt of her aching head.

"You better set down," advised Farley.

"No, I'm all right. I'm not a dance-hall girl. Mr. Cole knows who I am. He is a friend of the United States Marshal. I am a Government operative. You would call me a detective, I suppose. So I played the dance-hall girl and let men fall in love with me to see what I might learn. That is what he meant. I guess he knew who I was."

"And that is why yuh let men fall in love with yuh?" Thus Hashknife. She looked at him closely.

"Perhaps I should have said 'encouraged', Mr. Man."

"And the little birdies sing in the spring, tra, la, la, la," said Sleepy softly. Hashknife looked at Sleepy closely, and a grin wrinkled his homely face.

"The next place we go, I hope we'll find peace."

"As far as I'm concerned—we're halfway there right now," said Sleepy.

"What I want to know is this," said Farley thoughtfully, turning to Hashknife: "Did you suspect the preacher?"

Hashknife smiled softly and nodded his head.

"Yeah—in a way. I suspected Cliff, Vincent Roche and Blackie Dahl. By the way, Cliff, I've got a pearl necklace that belongs to you."

"Have yuh?" asked Cliff. "That's fine. I wondered where it went. I bought it for Dorothy, and lost it that night."

"Yuh suspected Cliff and the others, eh?" queried Farley.

"Until I eliminated 'em. Blackie wasn't smart enough; so I dropped him. Roche got shot, but the Trey of Spades kept on goin'; so that fact eliminated Roche. I never did suspect this Franklin person. I suppose he needed the money. I knew that Roche had been packed quite a distance after bein' hurt, but I thought Blackie was the one that done it."

"Vincent Roche is an old friend of my family," said the Countess painfully. She was keeping up on sheer nerve now. "He knew why I was here, and he was doing everything he could to assist me. I want Miss Parker to know that Vincent Roche was not making love to me."

Hashknife smiled and turned to Cliff:

"Is there a Mauser rifle at the Diamond V ranch?"

"Yeah. There's an old one that Vint bought from old Pete Duncan. We used to shoot coyotes with it."

"Well, that's what Franklin used on Roche. It seems that Blackie wasn't to blame for anythin' worse than turnin' caveman." Hashknife turned to the Countess.

"Blackie took you to the ranch and came back to town, didn't he?"

"I don't know," she replied. "It was all rather hazy. He roped me to a horse, I know that much. And he thought I was dead; so he was going away and leave the door open. He knew that some one was using this cabin, and he was afraid to stay."

"But what made you suspect the preacher?" persisted the sheriff.

"The smallest thing yuh could imagine," grinned Hashknife. "Did yuh ever see him smoke cigarets? Well, that's what made me suspect him, Jud. He was a regular feller in everythin' else. Nobody around here would ——"

"But he didn't smoke," declared Jud. "I'll leave it to everybody that knew him."

Hashknife stepped over and lifted one of the dead man's hands—the left one. The Thumb and first two fingers of it were yellow from nicotine stain.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" declared Farley. "It—it kinda looks like his is the first cigaret fatality we've ever had in Thunder county, by gosh!"

"How do you suppose he knew who I was?" asked the Countess.

Hashknife smiled at her.

"Because yuh didn't fit yore job, ma'am. Anybody would suspect you."

"Is that so?" She tried to smile at him. "And what did you suspect me of being, Mr. Man?"

Hashknife reddened slightly, and Farley stepped into the breach.

"I reckon we better load up the casualties, boys. We'll have to recover that stolen money, too. By golly, it all worked out fine."

The Countess was still looking at Hashknife, but he did not lift his head. Sleepy moved in closer to her and from his puckered lips came a few notes of "The Mocking-Bird."

Hashknife looked up at her and grinned slowly. There was a wistful expression about his eyes, as he went to her and held out his hand.

"I suspected yuh of bein' a mighty nice girl, ma'am; and I reckon my suspicions worked out. I hope I meet yuh agin' some day. C'mon, Sleepy."

"Ain't yuh goin' back with us?" queried Cliff, as they started toward their hidden horses back in the cañon.

"I reckon not," said Hashknife, looking back at them. "We ain't got nothin' to go back after."

"There's a lot of thanks comin' to you both, Hartley."

"Tha's all right, Cliff. Yo're welcome. Be good. So-long, everybody."

They turned and disappeared up through the brush, while the three men and the disheveled looking woman looked at each other wonderingly.

"Funniest thing I ever heard of," declared Farley.

"What—what is funny about it?" queried the Countess.

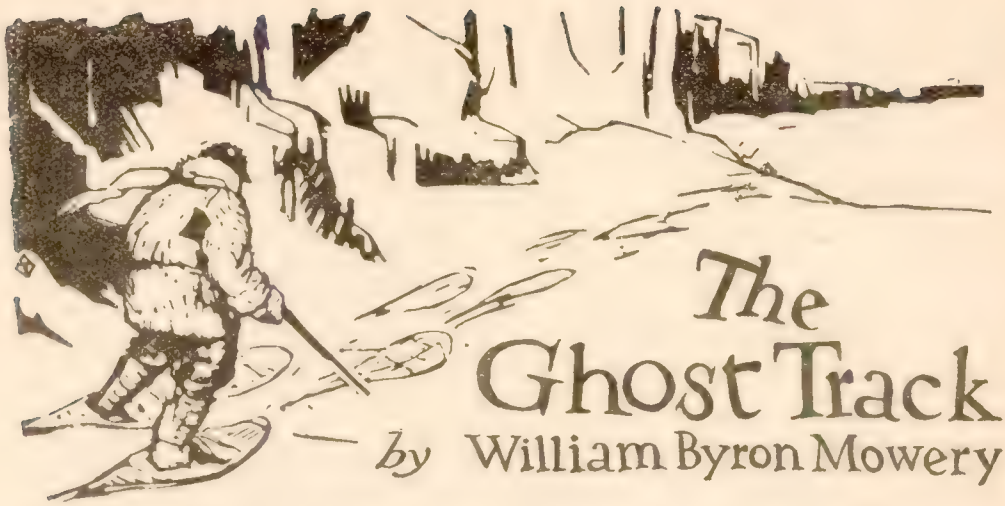
"That's what I say," grunted Buck. "It may be funny, but it ain't gettin' a —— of a lot of laughs out of me."

And from the rim of the cañon, the two riders looked back before they rode on toward the high range.

"We'll find the milk-and-honey land some day, Sleepy."

"Hm-m-m. Gimme a match, Hashknife."

They turned and rode away through the purple sage.



The Ghost Track

by William Byron Mowery

Author of "The Meekness of Mug-wa," "The Cannikin Clink, Clink," etc.

MID-FEBRUARY had closed down upon the Koksoak with clutch of ice and breath of hoar frost. It buffeted the Labrador river valley with storm after storm—short, terrible northwesters that struck bullet-swift, raged and roared a handful of hours, then kicked over with the suddenness of their coming. Concentrated blizzards they were, that plummeted the low mercury out of sight, flung their mile-long snow banners high aloft, and howled in the night like a legion of hungry-throated wolves sweeping across the frozen straits from Baffin ice barrens.

Trade was scant at Fort Chimo; and customers few and days between. Aside from a weatherwise trapper or two who had timed the blizzards to a split second and snow-shoed a hundred miles for a thimble of tea and a half-fathom of *stemmo*, there had not been a human being at the Fort in three weeks.

Then "Sikapu" McSale burst in one afternoon at deep dusk; as suddenly as if the storm had picked him up, hurled him across the seventy-odd miles to Chimo, and banged him against the door of the assistant factor's room.

Bent Avery was playing a game of three-dimensional chess* with Ridoubet, manager of the rival French House across the river. Present, and looking on with more curiosity than understanding, were young McKennie, store clerk, Rogers Bryce, slow-speaking and grave as always, several livyeres from about the post, and "Jay-Bird" Wilette, who, though he scarcely knew pawn from king and watched with puzzled amazement a swift duel between the versatile queens, was yet sure that Avery would win handsomely from Ridoubet.

"Well, Sikapu, hello!" the assistant factor greeted in surprize, as he stopped and turned to the raw-boned trapper.

McSale, a simple-hearted, emotional livyere, had a strange status at the Fort; he was a kind of honor convict. The summer before, he and his partner McCroquodale had done a cod voyage off the Labrador, and had been persuaded by the skipper-owner to help scuttle the old vessel for the premium. But the staunch antique, built of greenheart in the days when apprentices were hanged for careless work, refused to sink; and a vengeful, suspicious mate, who had been biding his time, discovered the auger holes when the ship listed.

This implication in barratry had drawn the livyeres a fine of a thousand dollars and a year in prison. But Avery had interceded for them. Not satisfied that they were criminally inclined by nature, he had used his influence to give each of them a chance to show definitely what stuff they were made of. With him assuming liability for their persons, they were paroled to him and given a winter to trap off their staggering money penalties.

* Cubic chess, or three-dimensional, is a variety of chess played on eight boards, one above the other, each player having two sets of pawns, and each piece having its vertical moves as well as its horizontal.

A long fur-path, long hours in patiently running it through the long white months, will conceivably bring the lucky Ungava trapper a thousand dollars; for the furs there are dark and of the highest quality. Not one man in a hundred, however, makes a thousand dollars in a season unless a precious fox turns up as a Manitou sending. The odds were heavy against McSale and McCroquodale meeting the fine in the allotted time. McCroquodale said nothing, he was silent by nature; but McSale swore to Bent Avery that he would tail a fur-path from the Koksoak to the Horsechops to make a free man of himself come spring.

WHEN he burst into the room that late afternoon, he had but half a man's wits about him. He was not scared—not even the sudden, sibilant breath of a water bear—that cold-nosed demon of dim snow storms along the coast barrens—held a terror for McSale; but he was excited and in a nervous rigor. His face was pinched raw. His patchy beard was coated with hoar frost from his breathing. An icicle depended from his rocky chin. And his kindly Scottish eyes held a look of wildness.

"What sort of a ghost was it, Sikapu?" Avery queried, motioning the trapper to a seat beside the "jerry."

"I didn't see it!" McSale exploded, taking the jest as a serious question. "I only saw its track!"

He shot out that last word like a javelin. The assistant factor forgot his quiet smile. It seemed that McSale had been up-country working desperately against time and loping the bushes alone till he was "shaking hands with the willows." A little human company, decent food, and a rest would bring him around.

"You need some food, Sikapu," Avery suggested. "You haven't taken out enough grub-debt this winter to keep a flea hearty. After you eat we can talk about the trouble."

"I don't want your grub, Bent Avery," McSale replied, holding himself in leash. "I want your *help*. Nobody but you can straighten out this—this thing. Anybody but you 'ud b'lieve I'm crazy, after what I've got to tell 'bout that snow track endin' right in t' middle of an open spot."

"Sit down and thaw out!" the assistant factor ordered rather sharply. "You've come seventy miles without a bite."

Avery left the room for a moment and returned with a mug of coffee.

"In a few minutes the grub will be brought in here. Drink this."

McSale gulped the coffee.

"Now, let Sikapu tell his story in his own way," Avery requested of the others present. "Don't let your imagination run amuck, Sikapu. Keep to facts, so that I'll have something to reason from."

"It began three weeks ago," McSale said, steady enough, moistening his lips repeatedly. "One mornin', just after a snow northeaster, all t' traps on my fur-path was knocked. Wasn't a carcajou's work; it couldn't have knocked fifty sets without gettin' fast or at least leavin' hairs in some. B'sides, I had a couple white fox an' some marten caught. A carcajou 'd torn 'em to pieces. B'sides, a carcajou don't use snowshoes."

"Snowshoes?" one of the livyeres, a black-eyed Frenchman interrupted; but settled back at a glance from Avery.

"Yes, I thought I saw faint racquet tracks at a couple places. But, as I said, a snow northeaster had blowed over durin' t' night, an' my fur-path is laid out along t' west cliff so that t'northeaster cover up 'most all signs. These northwest blizzards we've been havin' all winter can't touch my traps under the high cliff; but these snow storms from t' northeast can.

"Two days later, when I started to run my line, I come across a fresh racket track; a medium-sized beaver-tail. I followed it; it followed t' fur-path. All t' traps knocked again. No furs taken, s' far as I could see.

"T' track kept right under t' foot of t' cliff, where ever' sign showed plain. Whatever it was, it had plenty of chances to break its trail. But it didn't."

"Just what do you mean by 'chances to break its trail?' " Avery questioned.

"I'll explain. You know I'm trappin' in t' Sikapu valley. It's been pretty poor there this season. McCroquodale an' me, we hunted up another fur-path, an' he's been on it since December."

"And doing splendidly," Avery interrupted. "He will more than work off his thousand this winter. In fact, I think he has it to his credit now. Why didn't *you* take that other fur-path, Sikapu?"

"Only one of us could have it," the livyere said simply, with no hint of self sacrifice in his voice.

Avery nodded for him to continue.

"My trap line along t' high west cliff for twelve miles. I laid it out that way so it 'ud be protected from these northwesters. Only t' snow northeasters can bury my traps, an' they come only once a week. If those snow-shoes had got fifty steps away from t' cliff, t' northwester 'ud covered up their trail. But they hugged close, where ever' track showed plain."

"That's clear enough. You tracked the party—how far and where?"

"Clear to t' end of my fur-path, an' half a mile beyant t' last set, keepin' still under t' cliff. Then it broke up through a fissure, a narrow, steep, scrambly pass where I had to climb from ledge to ledge on mittens an' knees. Once atop t' cliff, t' tracks headed straight west two miles.

"They wasn't over five hours old at t' outside. Not a wind had stirred or a flake fell since that track was laid down. But all at once it stopped!"

McSale's voice dropped to a whisper. His listeners leaned forward.

"Stopped!" McSale repeated. "Stopped dead, Bent Avery. T' last track was plainer 'n day. There just wasn't any more. That was t' end. T' trail stopped short as t' track of a bird that's taken wing."

"In a woods, or near a cliff?" the French livyere interrupted again.

"Norry. On a level spot three hundred yards from a shrub even, an' a half-mile from a ledge. On a lake, a shallow lake that's froze clean to t' bottom. T' lake's wide open to these northwesters, an' t' wind has left only three feet of snow on it. I dug around to find a burrow. Wasn't none, of course, Dug down to t' ice. Granite hard; dannymite wouldn't budge it. I circled, all way from a hundred steps to a half-mile. Nothink but virgin snow. T' trail stopped, Avery! Stopped dead!"

"But where did the tracks come from?"

McSale groaned. "They didn't come from nowhere. They just began—at a spot under t' cliff, near my first trap, where t' ledge is only twice as high as me. They just began there, clean-cut as they stopped. No cave close by—nothink but straight rock wall."

McSALE broke off his narrative and paced the length of the room. He came back to the stove and smacked a fist into his palm.

"Just began an' just stopped, Bent Avery!" he cried. "Suppose you was alone in t' bush, with your fur-path run, with yourself shadowed by a thing as can turn a trick like that! Not just once. I'd laid it down as a freak. But three times! T' second time, its trail ended on a rock terrace; solid rock with just enough snow on it to make t' track plain. T' third time, on t' lake again.

"My brains are 'bout queered over this. I've heard of thievin' Nascaupees makin' a wide circle an' leapin' aside, somewhere on t' rounds, into a cave or such-like. Even carcajous 'll do that when you chase 'em steady for several days. But this was a straight-away trail. I've knowed men to reverse their snowshoes, an' tangle up who was chasin' 'em; but their trail had to lead somewheres.

"It's worse 'n puzzlin'; it's not quite—quite natural. I can't understand them tracks. Nor I can't understand why t' party didn't shoot me, nor why he didn't steal my furs. He's knocked me out'n 'most a month of my best trappin' time. Here's me with three hundred dollars in fur, an' only six, seven weeks to go. I've got no chance now any more to make good, but I'm not goin' to cave in, Bent Avery. Can't tell but what I might land a black b'fore t' break-up. If you can twist this thing out straight, I'll go back an' won't sleep b'tween now an' chinook-time."

The assistant factor sat silent several minutes. McSale, breathing heavily, watched him tensely, as if his last hope hung upon Avery's words.

"There is something wrong in the telling," Ridoubet spoke up, and the others present nodded to his words. "It can not be as Sikapu has told it to us. No earthly explanation is possible. Either he did not see the circumstances rightly, or else—there is a reason for his tale of ill luck."

McSale flushed under the unkind remark and the insinuation that his whole story was a fabrication, a bid for sympathy.

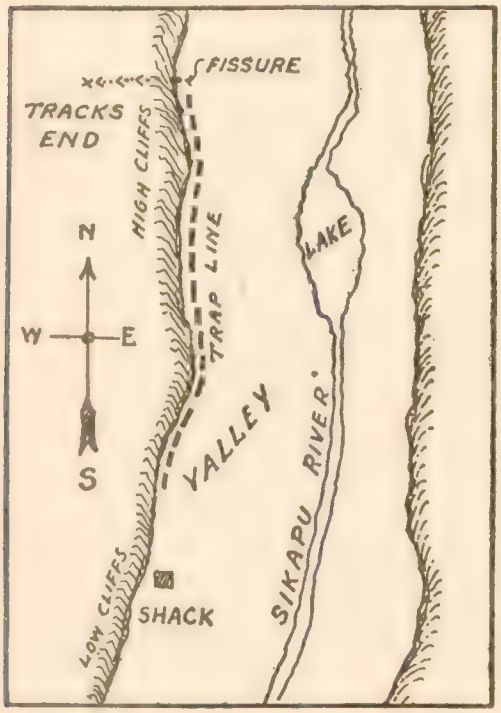
But the assistant factor was more charitable than Ridoubet or the others.

"You're a good trailer, Sikapu," he said kindly. "You're no person to be fooled easily, when you're not rattled. Now, were you in the right frame of mind to see things as they were?"

"I was t' first time. I was cool as t' weather. I got excited t' second time, but still I went over ever'thing careful. Last

week—I couldn't stay around there any longer. I left my fur-path an' come down t' river to Berry Boyd's shack an' stayed with him till I got over a nipped lung. Then I come on in—to get your help."

Avery at length smiled slowly. "I've been putting some things together these last few minutes. I believe I can help you a bit, Sikapu. And you deserve help. You've



worked yourself peaked this winter. And it's been a losing fight with you. McCroquodale has made good, but you haven't, chiefly because you stayed on the poorer fur-path.

"First, what was this party's motive in laying down those tricky tracks? To scare you, plainly; to scare you out of the valley; the very thing that happened. Why? you can be sure, Sikapu, he wanted that particular fur-path for himself."

"You mean he knowed something 'bout t' range that me an' McCroquodale didn't know?"

"Possibly," Avery assented. "Perhaps the party knew a litter with patches and silvers, and maybe a black or two, had been raised in that valley and were ranging along that trap-line."

"But then why didn't he shoot me, or take t' furs in t' traps?"

"A man can't murder a trapper and then take his fur-path without getting caught. So he tried to scare you out with those ghost tracks. In the meantime he ran your line and lifted what valuable foxes you caught. He let the common furs remain, to make you believe he took no pelts."

McSale started from the chair in which he sat rigidly. "By ——, Bent Avery, that's it! I didn't think of *that*. It explains ever'think but t' tracks. Some gut-eatin' Nascaupee turned that trick. But how'm I goin' to catch t' carcajou?"

The assistant factor raised a hand. "Don't get in a hurry. Let's explain those tracks just beginning and stopping. It was a weird thing—enough to upset you or anyone out there alone; but nothing very hard about understanding it, if you get the right combination. The main thing to keep straight in your mind is the difference between these northeasters and northwesters.

"This party hid somewhere near your range. These northwesters we've been having played right into his hand. While one of them was blowing, he left his hiding, racketed to the top of the cliff where his tracks began, and swung down over a sapling. All signs above would be blotted out in three minutes. His tracks below would seem just to begin. Then he ran your fur-path. His trail under the cliff showed, because it was protected from the northwester as you said. He went on to that scrambly fissure and there broke up over."

"But dat won't work," the French livyere objected. "Eef de nor'wester was still rippin', eet would blowed his signs shut. Eef eet had laid while he was runnin' de fur-pat', den how could he make dat single track out dere to de lake an' stop?"

Avery took his exasperating time in replying.

"The northwester *was* still blowing. It whipped his tracks shut the first step he took above the fissure. He racketed across the swells to that lake, there reversed his snowshoes, and waited till the storm kicked over. Then he walked back to that fissure. Sikapu says there were several ledges along its sides, and that a person has to scramble on hands and knees to get through it. That means the fissure is the only place where a double track won't show. So he had to turn his little trick in that

fissure. He sprang aside to some ledge or hole, and stayed there till a snow northeaster came along."

IT TOOK a full minute for the explanation to burst upon the men present.

McSale jumped from his chair again. "By ——, Bent Avery, that's it! It's plainer 'n daylight, after you explain it. T' carcajou's hidin' in that fissure!"

He caught up his snowshoes and rifle and started for the door.

"If he's so —— good at makin' tracks, I'll p'rsuade him to make some mighty fast ones away from my fur-path. If he plays ghost around there any more, he'll —— likely be turned into a real speerit."

"Just a minute, Sikapu," Avery said quietly. "There's no need for this haste. You said you wanted my help. I am not going to do a half-way job of helping you. Sit down, and listen.

"Six days ago a man came in with two prime silvers and a patch. That was a trifle unusual; ordinarily you trappers bring in a silver the day you catch it. I asked this party a few questions.

"He told me he caught the foxes along the landwash up the coast. But those pelts had the neck hairs dragged off, which showed me they were deer-bush foxes. From that I knew he was lying. Besides, he told me he caught the animals in deadfalls. As a matter of fact, they had been taken in traps. A deadfall animal has a blotchy skin. I suspected that he was not the rightful owner of those silvers and the patch—mighty good furs, by the way. So I detained him here at the Fort, by giving him temporary employment, until something — you, for instance — developed. Those three furs, if my suspicions about their ownership are correct, will come within a hundred dollars of making a free man of you, Sikapu. And tomorrow you can racket back and get the others!"

The assistant factor turned to the game again, but out of the corner of his eye he watched the livyere. His abstraction cost him the loss of his queen, trapped on the seventh board. McSale, so utterly bewildered that he was standing in the middle of the room, with knees half-crooked, and running gnarled hands through his hair, towered over him like a rock threatening to tumble.

Avery had irretrievably lost the game before a knock sounded on the door.

"Come in!" he called, rising.

Carrying a platter of food, McCroquodale pushed open the door and started to step inside.

At the totally unexpected sight of his former partner there, he reddened; at sight of the circle of men watching him he went livid; but when he saw the expression on Bent Avery's face, the tray dropped from his hands.

The crash jarred him out of his stupefaction. With a very visible effort he got something like a grip on himself, and stooped to gather the pieces.

"Don't bother, McCroquodale," said Avery in low and sharp voice that stabbed like a knife. "You aren't worthy to bring food to Sikapu McSale. A man who uses his craft to deceive his partner, who steals his partner's hard-won freedom, deserves to lose his own. An hour ago Sikapu was the beaten man, you the winner; now it is the other way.

"You'll stay in the butter-tub till the spring ship comes to take you to Rigolette. You've showed your stuff—to my satisfaction. And so has Sikapu."

Cartel to Wm. Shakespeare

A Complete Novelette by F. R. Buckley

Author of "The Primitive Method," "Wonderful Air," etc.

SCANDAGLIO

OH THAT I should be in prison, while this Wm. Shakespeare, this actor, this nag-holder, this ink-spiller, this paper-scratcher, this cramp-fingered scrivener, this empty suit of clothes, this sock, this buskin, this animated marionette, this foundered horse, this bent sword, this leaden breast-plate; this counterfeiter of verity, this brass florin, this liar, this rogue, this false trumpet—while he walks abroad, his ears still clinging to the sides of his bald head, earning his beer, his *rosbif*, his raw meat that the English so love, by publishing foul libels on a friend of mine!

Of the injury to myself, I say nothing—I say less than nothing—I am dumb; though were I at Avon upon Stratford, England, where this mountebank lodges, he might learn better manners than to put Luigi Caradosso into his plays under such a name as *Grumio*, and in the character of servant. I would have his thumbs, by Peter and Paul—as a matter of principle; not in anger. For all my anger is devoted to the outrage on my poor friend Pietro—Pietro degli Altozzi; rechristened, by this ruffian, *Petruchio*, with never a surname, and most cowardly slandered.

" 'Tis Art, man!" says my English cellmate last night, reading me the accursed drama by the last inch of this week's candle.

"Cartel to Wm. Shakespeare," copyright, 1924, by F. R. Buckley.

Art? Lies!

What to do?

I have sent a letter—a most respectful letter—a devilish scraping, mouthing, backbone bending letter to the governor of the castle, praying (I, a captain of horse, of him, a pot-bellied jailer) that the book, "The Taming of Shrew," be taken from the body of my late cellmate and read by any five honorable gentlemen, to see whether it doth or doth not provide cause for ear-slitting by Pietro, or by myself, as his nearest friend; preferably myself, as more used to the process.

What answer have I received—I, an officer of the guard of his Highness the Duke—though temporarily under a cloud? None—save that my turnkey, bringing me beans, growled that such a book would be the perquisite of the executioner, and that the governor had other business than to attend to prisoners' dignities.

What to do now?

Were I not a mild-mannered man, most unjustly imprisoned for dueling in the streets, I should resent this with more than the mere throwing of three-legged stools at underlings; as it is, forbidden to use the sword in redress of wrongs that shriek to heaven, I take meekly to the pen, and a heavy weapon it is. Nevertheless, I will wield it; setting down, to the confusion of all Englishmen, all rumor-mongers, all tear-squeezers, all guffaw-ticklers, all Wm. Shakespeares of Avon upon Stratford,

England—the true facts concerning Pietro and this wench Caterina. Her very name, this scribbler has wrong—it was not Shrew at all, but Paradisa (though it had better been Inferno). Nor was the name of her suitor *Lucentio*, but Lorenzo. And the very city where all occurred was not Padua, but——

No. I will not write the name of the city. Names of cities mean names of noblemen; and I myself have ears which I prefer to wear where God stuck them.

Let us call the town Rometia, then—since it was neither Rome nor Venice, and so, having rubbed our aching fingers with pork-fat, in the name of the Gospels, forward.

PRIME

TWO years ago, on just such a day as this which I see from my window (if you can call that a window which is mainly glazed with iron bars) my company was returning from a small business with—but curse these names. No matter. The business was, as it were, too large for an assassination, and not large enough for a war; we had four killed, half a dozen heads bandaged and an arm or two in slings—my left among them. *Per contra*, we had burned a castle and hanged a count with some dozen of his bodyguard; so, since it was summertime with the flowers as high as our horses' bellies, we entered Rometia not ill content.

In fact, as we passed the gate and rattled over the bridge, we were singing, Pietro in the lead with his tenor, because Rometia is scarce twenty-five miles from the duke's palace, our headquarters, and all of us expected to be at home with our wives and our what-nots, before dawn—except Pietro, who had neither; his pay being insufficient for the one, and his upbringing forbidding him the other. But how vain are the imaginings of man! And how true is the proverb which warns soldiers not to sing on the homeward march! There, at the head of the main street, sat a man on a bay horse, and in the duke's livery, with a despatch for me.

Pietro read it.

"We are to stay here," he announced, and when a groan rose from the troop behind, turned in his saddle as if to suppress a mutiny.

If I had not laid my hand on his arm, I believe he would have drawn steel. Men who think women are angels, are always devilish hard on other men.

"Nay, nay, nay," I blandished him. "Be calm. Bear with our weak humanity. H'm. Why are we to stay here? And for how long?"

Pietro looked again at the despatch.

"The peasantry of the late count," quotha, giving a contemptuous look at my sergeant, who was married only a week before the campaign, "appeareth also to be groaning, on account of certain burned crops; and we are to stay here ready to bear with *their* weak humanity should need arise."

There was sarcasm in this last; which, from any other person, and at any other time, I should have disciplined. I was, and am, fond of Pietro, however; and furthermore, the troop needed quick and comfortable billeting, lest they desert by half-dozens.

"My service to my particular and merciful good lord, my lord duke," I therefore fawned on the messenger, "and it shall be done."

"To the gallant captain," says he, fawning back, since neither of us knew which was the higher in favor, "the most respectful service of this speaker."

"Good-by, under the protection of God," says I, pricking his nag with my dagger; and so we descended upon the city of Rometia.

Not a bad city—for the men; I mean there were plenty of wineshops, and little of this —— latter-day rebellion and revolt which makes people who have not enough for themselves object to having a couple of men at arms share their meals with them. We billeted the whole troop within half an hour; but then the question arose, of our own lodging—Pietro's and mine. He, being young and military—and, as will appear, a most foolish and unworldly-minded youth—desired to lodge at a lawyer's, or some such rubbish; and indeed remonstrated with me when I drew sword on a wineshop keeper to extract the name of some more respectable citizen.

"We are soldiers," says Pietro, "not sybarites."

"Aye, soldiers," says I, "not hermits. Felloe, dost tell me there is no merchant, no rich goldsmith, nobody in this town that drinks better than Chianti?"

"There is M-M-Messer Pup-pup-paradisa,

on the Vuv-vuv-via N-Nuova," says mine host of the wineshop, after some thought and more shivering. "But he be-be-betroths his dud-daughter, and dud-desireth not cuc-company."

Since it must be obvious to any good subject of the duke that a man who betroths his daughter in time of war does so at his own risk, however, we sought out Messer Antonio Paradisa. He had—and has, most like—a pretty business with Bologna, Leghorn and such places, in leather, and nut-galls for the tanning of it, and similar truck. He was not glad to see us; but being e foxy old rogue, with a white beard and a full knowledge of how easily the duke's tithe of his pack-train loads might be increased to a fourth or a half, he dissembled passable well, and even sent for his daughter and her suitor from the garden where they were walking, to be introduced to us.

"The son of my associate in Verona—my business rival, so to say," mews the old gentleman, "is here; Messer Lorenzo Tuozzolo. We hope for a joining of the houses, and an end of rivalry. There is too much cutting of throats by you gentlemen these days, he-he, for us merchants to do more than we can help."

I—Luigi Caradosso—to be told I cut throats! There was a remark on the tip of my tongue; but my starry-eyed Pietro anticipated it. Ere now, in this narrative, I had purposed to describe him; but I am saved the trouble. He shall describe himself.

"Do I understand you to mean, Messer Paradisa," says he sternly, "that there is to be a marriage for business reasons?"

Old Paradisa blinked at him and rubbed invisible gold off the back of one hand into the palm of the other.

"Marriage?" says he. "Business? Are they not one and the same? My good young man——"

"My excellent old sir," says Pietro in a loud voice; and then I walked over to the window.

Oh, believe me, I had heard the sermon before; a dozen times; directed at me for the most part, under such circumstances as the chucking of a village-girl under the chin; and had not Pietro, in spite of his desperation in cavalry-charges, been so obviously deserving of excuse on the grounds of his ignorance of Woman, and so obviously reserved for heavier punishment than I could inflict, most certainly I should have nailed him to some door or other, long before.

"—love—" I heard the young fool proclaim to that antiquated money-box on two legs; and then strolled forth to meet the young couple who were arriving from the garden.

IT WAS a pleasant place—high, gray stone walls with vines on them; various fruit trees; borders of blue flowers, splotches of red bloom, bands of yellow thingummies, and so forth; and the girl had a garland of yellow around her brow. She was a trifle too slim for my own taste, but she might have earned my regard for all that, had this Lorenzo Tuozzolo had a shorter sword or duller eyes. I endeavor to be courteous to my hosts' womenfolk; but after a campaign, I can not be expected to carry it to the point of fighting with their relatives. And this Lorenzo looked as though he would fight, a —— long-legged, hook-nosed young man who looked less like the son of a merchant, than—well, one never knows.

I shook his hand, and a supple, sword-cuddling grip he had, to be sure.

"My lieutenant," I informed them, "is delivering a lecture on the six sacraments."

"Seven," says Lorenzo calmly.

"I bow," says I, "to your arithmetic. Anyhow, my friend is using but one of them at the moment; and whether there be five or six left in reserve, your father will be just as glad, madonna, to be interrupted."

She had a twinkling brown eye, that girl—and an inquiring disposition. Before such, to say anything is to say too much.

"Which sacrament is he discoursing upon, Messer Capitan?" she asked.

"He is twenty. Marriage," says I, looking from one to the other of them.

What does she do but loose this Lorenzo's arm and toss her head?

"Well, he need not, for me," she says. "Am I a bale of leather, am I a nut-gall, that common soldiers should chatter about my sale?"

She burst into her father's study with that—I heard Pietro bellow out the word "unrighteousness" as she opened the door; and then there was silence.

"This is a change, since we were down the garden," says poor Lorenzo, looking at me like a calf kicked by its mother.

I was about to deliver mine own views on

women, which meseemed might have given some comfort—when he, too, left me; and, rather than stand out there in the sunshine alone, I followed him into the counting-house or whatever it was. My breast-plate I had laid down upon a ledger, and my helmet I had hung on a rack of account-books, while my sword and gauntlets lay on a clerk's high stool; but none of these objects presented the ridiculous appearance Pietro did, at the moment of my arrival.

Certain folk have honored me by saying I have a quick eye for the point, in a battle, at which a cavalry assault will do the most good. I assure you it is nothing to the rapidity with which, in one of these sugar-slop battles they call love-affairs, I can tell when things have gone past human assistance. I am not without experience in this kind of warfare, either.

The girl, in short, had my wretched lieutenant by the hand, and he was standing there, his mouth still open upon the last word of his lecture, staring at her as if she had been a full-blooded Arab stallion at the least. When I remembered his behavior with the marchesa, in Verona; with that Madonna Fulvia, who could have done him most excellent service with the duke, and a dozen others, I could have wept, had I not so fervently desired to kick the young fool. A tradesman's daughter, after all! And to be disinherited, doubtless, if she failed to marry this leather-mercing sparhawk Lorenzo, who, I noticed, was beginning to flash a borrowing eye at my sword.

I picked it up—it, and my breast-plate, and my helmet and all, in my one good arm; and dropped them carefully on the floor with a loud crash.

"Ah, *cospetto!*" says I casually. "How clumsy I am. Your pardon, sirs. Your pardon, madonna. Your pardon, Pietro! Pietro! I said, 'Your pardon!'"

He stared at me.

"For what?"

Deaf, dumb, blind and paralyzed, by the eleven thousand virgins of Cologne!

"If we could be shown to our quarters?" I suggested, eying the young fool in a way which has quelled madmen before now.

"Willingly!" mews old Antonio. "You shall be in the pavilion at the foot of the garden. Willingly! Oh, willingly! Jacopo! Jacopo! The gentlemen wish to go to their quarters. In the pavilion, Jacopo!"

"And dinner?" says I, curling my eyebrows at him.

I meant that he should have it sent to us; but he thought, doubtless, that I was advising him that while we would sleep in an outhouse, we would not eat there. At their bushiest, eyebrows are ambiguous.

"In half an hour," the old fool admitted reluctantly.

"In half an hour, then," says his outrageous flirt of a daughter, squeezing poor Pietro's hand. "*A rivederci!*"

"*A rivederci,*" babbled the wretched young man, and suffered me to lead him out by the arm—as limp, as silent and as unlike himself as if he had lain under the retreat of an army.

'Twas bad enough to see him so changed.

Bad enough. But, glancing back from the doorway and noting the expressions on the faces of Caterina, of Lorenzo and of that cat-voiced old usurer Antonio, I felt in my bones a presentiment that worse was to come.

I must cease now—it is getting dark, and that Englishman—though peace be to his soul—used most of the candle. But let the reader examine his "The Taming of Shrew," by Wm. Shakespeare. Is there aught said of all this?

O Lord of Vengeance, how I do suffer with cramps!

SECUNDO

WELL, there were all my plans for that peacetime, knocked on the head and killed; and I had had plans, I assure you. But what scheme of enjoyment that is worth carrying out, can be carried out solo? A man can not walk by himself; can not drink by himself; can not even quarrel with himself, except in the way of remorse—which, to a man who has served princes for my term of years, is anything but enjoyable.

It is, in fact, to keep myself from being alone with my memories that I have a lieutenant, and I think the same reason holds for other captains. God knows that on the military side I have never seen the cadet who did not do more to irritate the men against discipline than to hold them steady under it.

And as a companion, of course, Pietro no longer existed. I will not go into the list of the antics he performed rather than frolic around the city with me; but I must narrate

that, dressed in his best clothes and his gold-inlaid stomach-plate, he would sit in the loggia for hours, holding skeins of yarn for this Caterina; and that whenever she went abroad, in the company of as wrinkled and cockeyed a duenna as ever disappointed me —the poor infatuated fool would slouch down one side of the street, a hundred paces behind her, regardless of the delight of our troopers in the wineshops, while this Lorenzo Tuozzolo stalked down the other pavement.

And it was a fair city, mind you; a —— tempting morsel, a juicy place, a cursed inviting, eye-flashing, bubble-winking town. After two days of such doings, I thanked God I had only one hand available to chew the nails off—and dropped in to see our entertainer, Messer Paradisa. Meseemed that if he had ducats invested in the suit of this Lorenzo, his frame of mind should march with mine own. And so the case proved to be. Having adjudged my complaint sincere, he laid down a pen from which, with his stub-teeth he had removed all vestige of feather, and spoke with intelligence.

"I would sooner deal in treason, poison, heresy—anything," says the old man, slamming a large book full of figures, "than in women. A cursed sex, Master Soldier!"

"When taken seriously," I provided justly.

"Who out of swaddling clothes has time to take them otherwise?" says Antonio. "Business, my good sir! Business! Now look at this wench of mine. Do you consider that she cares a jot or a tittle for this sermon-preaching young fool of a lieutenant of yours? Nay! Nay! Nenni! The whole matter is that Lorenzo came here with a manner too businesslike for her taste; and while she likes him, she will not have aught to do with his proposals until he ceases to know the difference between ten per centum and twenty, and becomes an amorous maniac. So she is administering the drug of jealousy, in the form of your lieutenant; and Lorenzo, who ought to be buying leather in the intervals of courting, *does nothing but dog about with his hand on his sword!*"

His voice rose to a perfect scream. I patted him on his wish-bone of a knee.

"If the matter stands so," says I, "sure the trouble will soon be over. Lorenzo is already as sullen, as sulky, and as jealous a young merchant as heart could wish."

"But he threatens to go home this very night, and the negotiations between his father and myself will fall through——"

I know not where the conversation might have gone from there; for at this moment, we were interrupted by a sound of tumult from the street outside. Through the open doorways of the house there flowed in, suddenly, a torrent of shouts and steel-clashing; and to mine eyes, as I arrived in the street, there appeared the spectacle of Pietro and this gangling Lorenzo, breast to breast, swords and daggers drawn, brawling for their lives in the middle of the strip of sunlight. Around them there was a mixed crowd of townspeople and our soldiers, shouting their lungs away—at three o'clock in the afternoon, and the town watch on its rounds!

I tried to intervene, but my sword was in the pavilion, and one arm in a sling; so that I took many harsh words, and two thrusts through the doublet, and did no good. Never have I seen such a mad combat; so deadly, so unconcealed, so totally abandoned. Already—and they had not been at it three minutes—Pietro's stomacher had most of the gold inlay picked out of it, and the wine-colored roquelaure Lorenzo had around his dagger-arm looked like a standard after the assault of a breach. Moreover, they fought in silence, though the audience made the welkin ring; and silent fighting means dead men. And dead men, except on the duke's service, mean trouble for captains.

HOW they went at it! Pietro, in one rally, got the point of Lorenzo's rapier across his right cheek, and landed his own blade, with a drawing cut that did him credit, across Lorenzo's scalp. They dyed the cobblestones red, and began to slip around in their own gore until they looked like Muscovites fighting on the ice; and finally, just as Lorenzo drove his sword against my lieutenant's plate with force enough to snap it at the hilt—around the corner, shouting and clattering their two-handed swords, came the town watch.

"Dueling!" shrieks the fat leader of them —I can not—I will not, call him a captain. "Arrest them both!"

"With the greatest of respect," says I, when the watch came near enough, "only

one of them. This gentleman is in the duke's service."

"Nevertheless," says the principal watchman, "he must—he shall—go before the syndic!"

"He will," says I, removing Pietro's sword from his hand and performing various pleasant tricks and flourishes with it, accidentally cutting off a plume to which the watch leader had no possible right. "But he will go under my arrest, not yours. Have you, by the way, ever heard the story of the sausages who attempted to rule in the larder? A very ridiculous fable—yet containing truth. Where does this syndic hold forth?"

"In the Palazzo Ricci," says the watchman.

"Then do you take your prisoner there forthwith," says I, "and we will follow at our convenience. Come, Pietro. Gentlemen, your very humble servant."

Of course, there was no excuse for such a high hand and still less for my knocking down an arquebusier of the watch who made motions to prevent our departure, but a captain must always remember that the city he is in may be his next scene of military operations, and that any fear he may inspire in the townsfolk now will greatly help him then. It was not to be expected, however, that the syndic, as a townsman, would appreciate this; in fact, he seemed most unjudicially furious when Pietro and myself arrived with half a dozen or so of troopers to keep us in countenance.

"How now, sirrah?" says the old man, glaring at me over his ermine collar.

"Thus," says I. "A post has been despatched to the duke, advising him of the attack, by a civilian, upon one of his guard, here to protect this city of Rometia against robber counts and suchlike all. I therefore charge you, until the duke's orders are received, to keep yonder maniac—" indicating Lorenzo—"under strict guard and ward."

He gasped, as who could blame him? Better that he have gasped ere now at the inventions of Luigi Caradosso.

"Robber barons?" mutters the syndic, looking around him helplessly. "Watch and ward? Attacks? Townsmen? What is this?"

Since none could tell him, he assumed, quite rightly, that he was being subjected, as it were, to a false attack, designed to throw his forces into confusion, and gain time.

"Robber barons?" he demands angrily, after thinking this over. "Robber barons? You here to protect this city against robber barons? A lie! You have hanged the Count of Pechiere, a poor, harmless, weak-minded fellow who did little; but what has the duke done to the Conte de' Rodenti, who only a year ago, stole one of our townsmen's daughters? Nothing! Nothing!"

Having no reply to this, I shrugged my shoulders, took Pietro by the arm and turned as if to leave the court.

"We shall be found, when required as witnesses," I said, fixing the door-guard with my eye before turning it over my shoulder at the syndic, "living peaceably in the house of Messer Antonio Paradisa, as heretofore."

"Ah," cries the syndic, "tell him your story about robber barons! It was his eldest daughter that was carried away!"

"I shall tell the duke," I remarked, "of the insults offered to his Highness by you, the principal magistrate of this, a city within an hour's ride of his capital. And so, with profound respect, Messer Syndic, *a riverderci.*"

I was glad when we reached the Via Nuova and were safe in our pavilion again; gladder still, when Jacopo came down the garden to announce the arrival of the reply to my post to the duke; but not so glad when I perceived that the bearer of the reply was, instead of an ordinary lackey, none other than Father Marco, the duke's chaplain.

To cut a long story short—for my fingers are aching again most fiendishly—this rubicund swine arrived smiling in our quarters, tied the cord of his Franciscan habit into a noose and shook it at me playfully; and then wrinkled up his nose in a way that made me shudder. Such is that priest's trick when bearing unpleasant news.

"Ah, my son," says he, "what haste! What incontinence! What a warring of sinful passions, to the confusion of the wisest plans!"

"Well," I demanded, "does Pietro go into this town's dungeon, or does he not?"

"He does not," says Father Marco, "by the especial and particular grace of our most good and merciful lord."

"God?" says I.

"Duke," says Father Marco. "But on a

certain condition. It appears—it hath been stated—one says—that you have claimed a mission here, to the extermination of robber noblemen. In particular, of the Conte de' Rodenti."

"Nothing of the kind!"

"Lie not, my dear son," says Father Marco indulgently, "and all shall be well. This wicked count, late a friend of our good duke, hath, it appears, carried away the daughter of a citizen."

"A year ago, they say," I remarked, "and the duke has been hunting with him since then."

"Doubtless," says Father Marco; "but quarrel not with thy salvation, my Caradosso. Since then, the count has arrogated to himself certain moneys which should, in the broader sense of justice, be the duke's; furthermore, the duke feels that the Castle of Rodenti— But enough. Suffice it that, by most excellent fortune for thee, his Grace's desires march with thy most reckless promise to the townsfolk. Thou wast halted in this town, indeed, to exterminate this froward nobleman. So, good my Captain, onward to the fulfilment of thy promise!"

"Attack the Castle of Rodenti—with one troop of horse?" says I.

"Nay, nay. The battle shall be tempered to the shorn captain," says his reverence. "The count is not in the castle. He is pleasuring himself at one of his villas."

"Then," says I, "we are to murder him, eh?"

"My son," says Father Marco, "eschew vile words. I fear you have a bloody mind, ever ready to find excuse for violence. I said naught about murder. But meseems that such injuries as this count has done our duke, should be sufficient cause for the *duello*. And in the *duello*——"

"I am not noble. He will refuse to fight me."

"Your lieutenant," says Father Marco, beaming upon Pietro, who was sitting in a corner like a profane image, "does not suffer under that disability. I shall trust to hear, within two or three days, that the wicked count has fallen to his sword. He can thus atone for risking his life out of the duke's service, by wagering it in the cause to which he is bound. And you, having merited imprisonment by being his aider and abettor in the first case, can absolve yourself by assisting him in the second. You will be his only assistant, by the way. No word of this will be spoken to any other person, under pain——"

He picked up the noose in his surcingle again, waggled it at me playfully, and departed.

I stood paralyzed with dismay. I have memories, as aforesaid, which I could wish belonged to some one else; but there is no murder in them, I thank God! And this was to be murder. Pietro was to fight this count, and if the count proved too strong for him, I was to play some foul trick —beat up his sword, or the like. If that failed, or he had aid at hand, we should be killed, the two of us, in most dishonorable fashion; if it succeeded, we should be blood-marked on the forehead for the rest of our lives. And if we refused, we should be hanged to a certainty, though the duke had to hunt us through all Italy.

"Pietro!" I cried, shaking him out of his daze. "Do you understand what your foolery has brought upon us?"

"It is to avenge her sister," says he, standing bolt upright like Satan at a baptism.

(My dinner has just arrived.)

TIERCE

I APOSTROPHIZE thee, Shakespeare! Stockfish!

QUARTE

WELL, we argued, I exhorting, Pietro rebutting and raving, the livelong night; and how it came to pass that by morning he had become the leading spirit of us two, though most insufficiently whiskered and barely a year under arms, I do not know. But I have remarked it as truth in many conditions of life that the man possessed of an idea or desire so ardent as to blind him to prudence shall always take command of one who, like myself, remains sane enough to desire his honor unsmirched and his neck untwisted.

When himself, Pietro liked honor and life —and was my lieutenant. Now, having become love's own pet lunatic, ready to get us both broken on the wheel to avenge Caterina's sister—he was my captain, and I little better, in truth, than the servant *Grumio* with whom this Shakespeare has besamed me.

The first rays of sunshine, striking over the eastern garden wall on to a red flower bed where dew-drops glittered like diamonds

on a velvet carpet, found us sitting by the window of the pavilion in silence; our beds unhollowed, our morning meal, brought by Jacopo, untouched. And as thus we sat, down the side alley of the garden comes old Antonio Paradisa, the morning robe of his guild tucked up about his hams, skipping from shadow to shadow of the pleaching like a scared monkey from branch to branch in the forest.

"Her sire!" says Pietro piously.

"Who doth not desire, by his actions," says I, rising and opening the door, "that she should see him from her chamber-window. Good morrow, Ser Antonio."

Ah, beware of the maid whose father looks nervously about him and scrambles into doorways at the loss of his dignity because he thinks she may not approve his doings!

"A bad morrow, sirs," says the old man, standing upon our floor and trembling, yet with a strangely hopeful eye fixed on Pietro. "A very bad morrow, gentlemen! I fling myself on your necks."

This made me retreat from him; but, on the contrary, Pietro advanced.

"You are in trouble, sir?" says he in a tone that might have asked Aphrodite for a kiss.

"Trouble?" shrieks the old man. "Trouble upon trouble, woe upon woe, loss upon loss, ruin upon ruin! And all because I ventured my hospitality upon you!"

He had ventured nothing that I would not have pulled out with his beard, had he refused it; but no matter—Pietro, as I have said, was our spokesman in the matter.

"Have you not ruined my daughter's love affair?" demands the old merchant. "Have you not had her suitor, a most worthy youth with a large fortune, clapped into jail for brawling, while you walk free? And with that freedom, are you not commanded to go murder my other son-on-law, my prop, my pillar, the nobleman in my family?"

Had I been doing the talking, I should have demanded how he came by knowledge so confidential, without spying. But Pietro, as I have said, was amorously maniac.

"You call your prop, your pillar, your son-in-law," says he sternly, "the man who has carried off your daughter and brought dishonor on your family?"

"Carried her off?" wails old Antonio. "What else could he do? Could he, a nobleman, come and entreat with me, a merchant, in any honorable way? Nay, it must needs seem a violence—but he married her."

Pietro swallowed something in his throat.

"But," says he, "why then do you not proclaim it to the town, which now sneers at you?"

"Shall I ruin myself?" moans the old rogue. "If they pity me, do they not give me their trade? Hath not my name become known farther and wider than ever before through this business?"

This was too much—on an empty stomach.

"Peace," said I. "Thou revoltest me."

Now he burst into tears, the miserable, ducat-shaving old bag of bones, and wept in all abandon with his head in a plate of cakes.

"All—all have I done for my sweet poppet, my Caterina," he gurgles. "All my pennies have I amassed for her; and now—what? She hath lost her lover, and I have lost my alliance with his father. Ruin upon ruin!"

Pietro turned pale.

"Her lover?" says he. "This Lorenzo?"

Old Antonio got up—with eyes as dry as baskets of sand.

"Yea, young man," says he weakly. "It is not to be expected thou shouldst understand such a thing; but Caterina has been crying out her eyes all night over Lorenzo's imprisonment—though I, of course, am not supposed to know that. As for thyself—pouf, I blow thee away. Thou wert no more than the supplier of the romance which Lorenzo forgot to bring. It is only natural that a girl whose own sister had been carried off by a nobleman should desire some little parade of sword at her own betrothal. Lorenzo should have known that—I should have known it. But we were too busy buying leather."

With the certainty of the Holy Evangelists I would have taken him by the scruff at this and propelled him into his own garden heels over crown, had not the sight of Pietro's face paralyzed me with pity. I started over to him, but he waved me aside. I perceived that he had taken the merchant's words for truth, which indeed they were; and that, being mad, he thought them matter for more than a denunciation of this Caterina.

"Sir," says he, fidgeting with his fingers, "I fear my appearance hath done thee a

great wrong. My excuse is that though thy daughter did not love me, I loved her, and do still."

"It may well be," says the old merchant, waving his arms like a windmill and walking up and down the pavilion like a wolf with the colic. "It may well be. But thou hast ruined her. She weeps for Lorenzo; he weeps for her; but when he is released, she will despise him for that he is again no more than a leather merchant. O swaggering young soldier, what confusion hast thou wrought!"

"I would unwreak it if I could," says poor Pietro. "But——"

Perhaps he was going on to say—as I would have said—that if the girl wished romance, let her marry him and have it; or if she wanted her Lorenzo, let her take him; and in either case, and in the name of heaven, let her hold her peace and cease interfering with men's business. But old Antonio would not let him speak. Nay, nay. He was a shrewd bargainer.

"I am a poor man," caterwauls the reverend hypocrite. "It is a matter of time before I fail in my business, and my Caterina walks the streets in rags. What is thy pay, young man? Ah! A pair of stockings for my daughter—at the wholesale rate. And yet, in the name of affection, thou hast disgusted her with one whom she loves, who could have saved me from ruin, and who could strangle her with stockings, if need arose!"

IT SEEMED to me that need had arisen, but it would have been dangerous to say so. Yea—dangerous; and the man who calls me a coward, I will treat as I will treat this Wm. Shakespeare, who represents Pietro as a ranting, storming, worldly-wise ruffian; whereas in fact the tears were streaming down his cheeks as Antonio finished. That was how I knew he was dangerous. What says the proverb? "The lover who has tears in his eyes has a dagger in his hand."

"I would repair her happiness if I could, be assured," says the wretched youth—entirely forgetful of the duke, of himself, of me, of everything but that brown-eyed jilt then reposing on a silken bed. "I am going away——"

"Away?" shrieks old Antonio. "Leaving thy memory? Wouldst thou ruin me beyond redemption? In the flesh, thou might tread on her toes, or jostle her, or quarrel and so disgust her; thy memory never will, and——"

"Then what is he to do?" I growled. "Neither go nor stay? How then?"

Oh, the cunning in the old dog's eye! He pretended to hesitate and think. Well I knew he had had the plan in his fox's brain for hours!

"There is a way to cure children of stealing sugar," says he slowly. "To leave the sugar pot open, so that they eat to excess and sicken themselves."

Pietro stared at him in silence. So did I.

"Caterina pines for romance," says her father, with a calm smile remarkable in one so close to the edge of ruin. "Let her have it—more than she desires. That is the only way to bring her to her senses. She covets her sister's abduction. Let her be abducted."

"By me?" whispered Pietro.

"Aye," says Antonio Paradisa.

"We have other business in hand," said I as loudly and as angrily as I felt. "We are officers of the guard, not——"

"Peace, Luigi," says Pietro, and I saw that he was trembling violently, as if at his first battle.

Of course, I saw immediately that he was going to fall in with the suggestion. It was fiendish cleverly contrived. A high-handed carrying off! An abduction for the girl's worldly good—and always the chance that her father might be wrong, and that she would wed her abductor!

"When?" whispers my wretched lieutenant—my wretched ex-lieutenant; for I was resolved that in this affair he should boast no connection with me.

"At once," says Antonio. "This evening. I have a relative in the country at whose house Caterina hath never been. She——"

This was too much. The Duke's business attended to, Pietro could have freedom to embroil himself in play-acting to his heart's desire; but to put the latter in the place of the former was to desert me and jeopardize both my neck and his own.

"Be not a fool, old man," I therefore said. "Today! This evening! Why, thou old goat——"

"Very well," says Pietro, disregarding me. "I will do it."

"Thou wilt not!" says I, gripping him by the wrist.

When sane, he is bodily weaker than I, but now he wrenched himself free with such a violence as sent me staggering.

"I will!" he says with his eyes blazing. "I will!"

To be flung across a room by a mere boy—a subordinate officer! He was mad, and I had one arm in a sling, and besides, I loved him; so that I did not return at him sword in hand. But I did worse—for him; and as it turned out, for myself also; I gathered my cloak and my velvet cap, and washed my hands of the business.

"Doubtless," I told him, turning at the door, "I shall have killed the Count of Rodenti, Pietro, in time to return and see thee hanged by the duke for neglect of his orders. Only one thing I ask—when they drop thee out of the execution window, kick not thy heels too high. The movement lacks dignity. And so, farewell."

I strolled up the garden, now fully lit by the higher-risen sun, thinking that of all men living I was the wisest and most prudent. With judicious stimulation at wine shops, this sentiment lasted for some time.

But of course, I should have stayed and fought out the argument that had begun in the pavilion—with swords, if necessary; by calling the troop to arrest Pietro, if nothing else would do.

As it was, the sentiment of prudence wore off before dusk; and, when I returned to the pavilion, decided that not even the duke's business and the sanctity of my neck, would excuse me for deserting a friend in the grip of mania, dusk had fallen, and the abduction had taken place. Jacopo (whom I found sedulously searching for stealable items in our equipment) gave me the details after I had twisted one of his ears nearly off—a walk in the garden, during which Caterina had railed at Pietro, and Pietro, instead of speaking low and humbly as was his custom, had railed back.

At the door of the garden, a coach; the garden gate open; Caterina, in the midst of a virago outburst, seized around the waist by Pietro, storming that he would not be mocked and played with by any double-dealing chit; deposited in the coach, and driven off, screaming though gagged, in the direction of Monterosso.

Never shall I forget the prophetic cold sweat in which I donned my armor, kicked Jacopo into the middle of a flower-bed for saying all had gone perfectly, got my horse and started out along the Monterosso Road after the fugitives.

B-r-r-r!

QUINTE

THEY made a wide circle—for what purpose, I could not then decide, there being no pursuit—and then they doubled back, over most singularly coach-jolting, fetlock-twisting, liver-jouncing roads, to the hill-pass of the Rodenti Valley; and I caught up with them just as the moon rose and the coach lumbered out of the cypress-avenue of the pass.

And I was amazed; for while I had heard recognizable sounds of singing for the last mile or so, it had not, indeed, seemed possible that my pure Pietro could be singing such a tosspot chantey as that concerning the Flower Girl of Ravenna. My wounded arm had fevered slightly under the influence of emotion; and I had ascribed the hearing of this song to the same delirium which had caused me, leaving Rometia, to hear bells ringing an alarm.

Yet, as I rode up, Pietro was undoubtedly singing as he rode ahead of the cortège; and what's more, the two drunken fellows with pistols, who rode behind the coach, were roaring in chorus with him. One would have said a bacchanale! A traveling debauch!

"Pietro!" says I, reining in beside him.

He rolled his eyes in the moonlight; and I perceived that, though he was singing the verse about the daffodils, and continued to sing it instead of answering me, they held a most pained and haunted expression.

"Pietro," says I. "What is this? Art thou mad? Shall I stun thee?"

He must have seen that I meant what I said, for he stopped singing himself, and roared out a most vulgar order to his fellows behind, to do the same. Then he spurred still farther in advance of the coach and vouchsafed an explanation.

"I do this to disgust her," says he with a catch in his voice.

Would you not have stared at him? So did I.

"Meseemeth," says he, as if his throat had shrunk to the size of a shepherd's pipe, "that to smirch a lily can not be for the lily's good; but then, I am not experienced with lilies."

"Scorch hell-fire, and thou not good with a brazier," says I irritably. "What jargon is this?"

"O Luigi," says the young fool. "Mock

me not! Indeed, I suffer most cruelly; but I committed a fault in raising my eyes to one so far above me, and I repair it as best as I may. Her father saith that this taste of hers for romance must be crushed ere she will w-w-wed this Lorenzo, who is rich and can make her happy; and so—I crush it. But oh, her terror when we thrust her into the coach!"

"Yes," says I, "and oh, her sharp tongue, too, according to Jacopo."

"Ah—but she loves me not," says Pietro sighing heavily. "She said so."

"Then why—?" I demanded.

"For that I love her," says he; and then roared back to the wheel-riders. "Ho, dogs! Rat-faces! Are we near there?"

"Very near," hiccoughs one of the fellows.

"Then fire us a salvo," yells Pietro, "to let all know we are coming!"

They hesitated.

"Messer," begins one of them.

"Thunder and lightning!" yells my gentle lieutenant. "Fire, you winetuns!"

They obeyed him, in fear of their lives, and the horses bounded and coughed as the boom and stink of gunpowder filled the air. From inside the coach there came a faint scream.

"This is mountebank's business," says I, as we came in sight of a porter's lodge.

"I am well aware," says Pietro; "and at the end of it, Pietro degli Altozzi will cease to live. Now, lively around the corner, boys! Sharp and yarely with it! Lash, you rats. Hurrah!"

Well, whatever Pietro's motives—and, as can clearly be seen, they were of the most lunatic—meseemed that his results were german to the case. I mean that he caused the coach to round the corner so closely that one of the wheel-bosses hit the stonework, because he considered Caterina Paradisa an angel; but in fact, she deserved being jolted as she must have been, in recompense for her deviltries.

Being over thirty and at best not overfond of slim women, I perceived my lieutenant's angel to be a fickle, bad-tempered chit, who would put the throat of her lover in jeopardy to a stranger, just to satisfy her envy of an elder sister. She was, in brief, one of those women who set men a-fighting—not to mention a-hanging and a-cutting of their own throats as Pietro proposed; and the laws of chivalry should no more protect such than the laws of venery protect vermin.

Still I was sorry for her when the coach stopped before the doorway of a stone villa with lights in the windows and Pietro ordered his two drunkards to hand her out of the coach. He had intended to do this himself, and to refrain from touching the vixen's hand cost him agonies; but, having refrained, he stood near the drunkards with such an expression on his face as changed the two of them into sober lackeys until Caterina was past their hands. At best, though, the experience was not pleasant; she looked very tired, very draggled; and I saw Pietro nerving himself to continue his brutality.

"Go in," says he.

"I will not!" she flashes at him, her teeth clenched and her hands likewise.

Pietro leaped up the steps, kicked the door open with a crash, took her by the arm, and pulled her in. He had, be it recalled moreover, a rapier slash on one cheek.

"You will, by ——!" says he, in a voice that was meant to shake the earth, but which shook on its own account. "Ho, maids! Women! Where in the name of——"

Not having the key to the puzzle; not knowing, as I did, that the boy dared not meet her eye lest he drop on his knees and beg forgiveness in spite of himself—Caterina must have thought him mad. When no servants appeared, he rushed over to a great gong that hung in the hallway, drew his sword and beat upon the metal with the flat of the blade until the air seemed made of brass, and the top of my head ached.

A maid came running down the stairway.

"Take this lady away, and make her fit to eat supper with me," says Pietro, pointing at Caterina, but not looking at her. "And mind thee, woman, let her not escape. Thy throat answers it."

HE PAID no further attention to either lady or maid, but smacked me on the shoulder in a way I loathe above all things, and demanded that I come drink a bottle with him. And yet, mind you, when we got into the room where supper was laid—and a tempting supper it was—he would not touch a glass.

"Nay," says he, seating himself and covering his eyes with the napery, "I am to act drunk. That is enough. God forbid that I should be so."

"Well, God forbid that I should stay sober," says I; and He did.

Not, mind you, that I was rolling; far from that; but I forgot the duke, and began to laugh at Pietro, and failed to see any reason why I should not eat supper in my breastplate. I would have taken my baldric and sword off, but that the sash would not slip over my head and my fingers seemed unable to undo the knot. This same exhilaration, this same rosy mist of wine, is what makes my memory of the dinner and the events thereat less crystal-clear than my recollections before and after.

I know that Caterina delayed her coming to supper until Pietro went to fetch her and returned leading her by the wrist; and I well remember his reply to her protests at sitting with men in armor. I will give this speech *in extenso*, both to show I was not discourteously drunk and as proof of how much truth can be spoken by a man who is convinced he is lying.

"Seat yourself, nevertheless, madonna," says Pietro, pushing her gently into a chair. "True, we have breastplates on; but then, you see, we are soldiers. You must take the fat with the lean, my sweet, and the breastplates with the gallantry. Desired you not the sight of weapons, you should have reconciled yourself to that Lorenzo; but on the contrary, he would have had inky fingers. You chose me, and you have me. If I were not myself, I should be somebody else, and then you would not love me. Take olives."

"I will not!" says Caterina viciously.

"Take olives!" roars Pietro. "They are good for the complexion, and having taken such trouble to pluck thee, my flower, I will not have thee wilt! Take olives! !"

"Nay!"

"Yea!"

"Nay!"

"Yea!"

He said this last so weakly that it was scarcely of avail; for his eyes had met hers; and for him to detach them, something violent was necessary. Like a drowning man, he groped with his hands, and caught hold of a great dish the nature of which I forget —a boar's head or the like of that—and flung it crashing and spinning into the fireplace.

Being tired after the long day, I had closed my eyes for a moment. I opened them scarce a second after that imbroglio, to find Caterina, pale and terrified, eating olives as if her life depended on it.

"Yea," says Pietro, as pale as a sheet and with his eyes full of tears. "If thou wilt be a soldier's bride, thou must learn the meaning of orders."

Caterina looked up and I was astonished at the humble look in her eyes.

"When—when shall we be wed?" she asks, trembling.

"When was thy sister wed, whom thou so envied?" demands Pietro, clinching his hands lest emotion betray him, and by accident pulling the cloth off his end of the table.

There was a mighty crash; which, among other things took away my trencher from me, and Pietro's from before him. Further reply to her question was lost in it.

"Thou art so violent!" says Caterina, beginning to weep.

"Whose fault is that?" askes Pietro, rushing down to her end of the table at sight of her tears and excusing his advance—when he had checked it—by taking handfuls from a dish that stood before her and eating as he talked. "While I was gentle with thee, and humble, and gave thee kind words, and served thee instead of making thee serve me, I was most foully ill-treated. It was necessary to don armor to win thee, my morsel, and having donned it, I can not be forever buckling and unbuckling. Dost thou like this dish?"

"Indeed, yes," says she humbly.

"It is obscenely ill-cooked," says Pietro, and flung it into the fireplace after the boar's head.

Then, since tears were streaming down his cheeks in spite of all he had done, he started to walk around the room, cutting the wicks off the candles in the wall-sconces with his sword.

Oh, ridiculous sight! Oh, wall-eyed and stiff-kneed generation, as the chaplain hath it! Oh, preposterous young woman and twenty times more preposterous young man! Well, since manners of the camp seemed in order, I pushed back my chair, put my feet on the table and prepared at least to be comfortable while they settled their argument between them. I do not know how long I dozed; but however long, it was an ill made move to do so at all; for when I was wakened by a loud scream from Caterina, I tipped my chair over backward and fell to the floor.

It was from this position that I perceived one of the dining-hall's windows to be shutterless, and the place of a statue, now overturned, which had stood before it, to be occupied by that —— Lorenzo Tuozzolo, most scandalous ragged and mud-stained, with a bandage about his own head, and holding in his hand a pistolet which he was presenting at the head of my unfortunate lieutenant. How he came there, I know not; he had broken jail, of course; bullied some half-lies out of Jacopo, I suppose; followed me, perhaps. However, there he was. And:

"So!" says Lorenzo.

Pietro had left but two candelabra alight, and in these the bending candles were flickering wildly as the night air gusted through the ravished window. There was enough illumination for me to see, however, that Pietro's condition was parlous. He had sheathed his sword while I had been dozing; moreover, he was separated from Lorenzo by a pile of the wreckage of that mad-house banquet; and furthermore, as he stood there, Caterina Paradisa was clinging to his arm.

"I—I came with him—willingly," says she. "Kill not, good Lorenzo."

Pietro thrust her behind him.

"Liar!" he shouted. "I dragged thee here by the hair of the head, and it is so I detain thee! Now, my hide merchant, shoot when thou art ready."

Madness? Aye. But as I got to my knees for a crawl along the floor toward Lorenzo's legs, in the hope that I might clutch them while still he was gloating over his revenge, I perceived Pietro's reasons. This play over, he had purposed to kill himself. How much better if Lorenzo should save him the trouble—and how much more impressive an ending to the farce! Nevertheless, I disapproved it. Pietro, for all his woman-worshiping, was a good officer.

"Oh, I will kill thee, never fear," says Lorenzo, toying with his pistole—he had taken it from a jailer, in escaping from the prison in Rometia—"but for mine own sake —not for yonder jade's. False though she is, I believe her now. She *did* come with thee willingly, which is the more injury to mine honor."

"Nay!" clamors Pietro, the fool.

"Aye!" shouts Lorenzo. "Do I not know her?"

"Then slander her not," says Pietro. "She is as pure——"

"Ha-ha-ha!" bellows her most wretched betrothed, whose knees were now a bare ell outside of my reach.

"Thou slimy-minded snake!" cries Pietro, full of indignation and quite forgetful of the part he was to play.

Lorenzo leveled the pistolet at his head.

"Employ thy last moments in prayer," he sneered, "and not in defense of a ——"

Pietro gave a howl of fury, leaped the wreckage and struck him in the mouth. The pistolet banged not—such things never do, save after half an hour's coddling; which is the reason that they will never take the place of the sword. Had Lorenzo contented himself with a dagger, even, Pietro had been a dead man ere his fingers touched flesh; as it was, the two men rolled on the floor together, equally equipped with the weapons of nature. And, my services as leg-snatcher being now superseded, I arose, stood by the overturned table, and watched them.

I noticed, for a strange thing, that whenever the tide of battle brought Pietro, her ravisher, uppermost, Caterina Paradisa was silent, with clasped hands; but that when Lorenzo, her rescuer, got his hands on Pietro's throat (as twice happened) she shrieked and clutched my arm as if to thrust me into the business.

"Nay, nay, my lass," says I, shoving her out of my view of the fight. "Let them content themselves."

As I spoke, Pietro heaved with his legs and struck Lorenzo between the eyes with his clenched hand and rolled upon him; and while he was furthermore strangling his opponent to death, I had leisure to reflect how strange it was that these twain, who had formerly fought because both loved the same woman, should now be at each others' throats because one of them loved her no more. Such is the way of women, however, if taken seriously; present or absent, loved or unloved, good or bad, fair or foul, they cause fighting.

"Recant thy lie!" gasps Pietro.

"Never!" gurgles Lorenzo, writhing himself loose and scrambling to his feet, where he stood swaying—Pietro in face of him, ready to begin again.

Lorenzo's eyes turned on Caterina; and I fancied I saw that in them which I most heartily approved.

"After—all," says he, with the residue of breath that was left him, "thou art not worth it."

"Thou liest!" says Pietro, taking half a step in advance.

Lorenzo looked at him, mopped some blood off the lower half of his face, glanced back at Caterina, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Very like," says he. "At best—what matter? Thou hast the girl. Willy—nilly—all one to me. I desire her not. I have been mad. Why should I fight about what is no concern of mine? See thou to her, Messer Soldier—and I wish thee joy."

Oh, my poor brains! What an evening!

"But—" says Pietro feebly.

What hypocrites we all are! To hear the boy droning out that reluctant "But—" as if he would fain have had Lorenzo change his mind; and to see him inwardly exulting over the goodness of God! Lorenzo's escape from prison, and his following of me—that is what he had done, and the alarm bell I had heard in Rometia was giving warning of his evasion—these events had changed the whole effect of Messer Paradisa's plan. Instead of hamstringing Pietro in this race of love, the business was, it seemed, to leave him the course clear!

"I bid you good night," says Lorenzo, smiling in a twisted manner that I did not entirely understand. "And farewell."

With that, he stepped upon the window-sill, used a velvet curtain as a leaping-rope and was gone.

Caterina looked at Pietro, her hands clasped on her bosom; Pietro, thinking, me-seemed, of the insults and injuries he had heaped upon her so that she might fly to the now closed arms of Lorenzo, stared at me like a horse with a spear through it; and I, winking at the two of them, kissed my hand and strolled toward the door of the banquet hall.

"*A riverderci*, my sweet poppets," says I, turning in the portal.

IT WAS a shock, believe me, to turn again, after kissing my hand once more through the door-crack and shutting the oak behind me, to come face to face with a handsome stranger in rich apparel, without cloak or hat (but accompanied by a pretty girl) who was rushing toward the banquet hall with a drawn sword in his hand. Behind him showed a small rabble of house-servants, variously armed. All stopped in their paces at my appearance—which must have been sufficiently strange—hair, breastplate, and slung arm, a flower over my ear and a fatuous smile on my face.

"Retreat, retreat," says I, rightly deducing that they had been alarmed by the noise of the fight—and wondering, in an undrowned corner of my brain, who the —— this young man might be. "The war is over. Sweet Cupid," says I, smiling at the girl, whose features were strangely familiar, "hath usurped the place of ——"

All of a sudden, I was permitted full knowledge of the situation in which I stood. The inspiration came from the face of the girl before me; but it was accompanied by a strange clarity of remembrance and decision which can be given only by wine. I daresay I blanched. In a moment, you shall see why. If I had my choice of two curses—boils or a crystal mind's-eye, I would choose boils.

"What ails thee, soldier?" demanded the young man.

"I—I have just—thought of a jest," says I, finding my lips stiff.

"Of a funeral, judging by thy look!"

"There is a funeral *in* it, says I, looking the young man in the eye. "Hast thou not heard of it from thy—from Messer Antonio Paradisa?"

The young man stared at me blankly.

"Nay!" says he. "What is this?"

O wretched and unnatural old man! O Paradisa, how will I deal with thine own hide, thine own leather, when I leave this prison! Having wed his elder daughter to a nobleman and got twice the legal rate of advantage from the connection by exposing himself as a victim of oppression to the town, he was now ready to have that poor count killed off, if necessary to his other schemes.

In other words—he had needed a house to which Caterina could be abducted, and a witness to her virtue despite the abduction; and so he had failed to warn Rodenti—who now stood before me—of the plot against his life, well knowing he would not have stayed to play honeypots, with daggers at his throat.

I advanced with much pity and took him by the shoulder.

"Listen," sayd I, "thou art, doubtless, the owner of this house—the relative of whom Antonio Paradisa spoke? Doubtless

thy name is Giuseppe and thou art a cloth-merchant?

One of his followers made a move to lay hands on me; but I pushed him so that he fell on his back.

"To a cloth-merchant named Giuseppe," says I, seeming drunker than in reality I was, "I can refuse nothing. He has no connection with dukes and—counts. So I can confess to him that both Pietro, within there, and myself, should be at quite other business than this. We should be cutting a throat. We should be cutting the throat of the Count of Rodenti, as we were commanded by our master the duke."

The girl gave a little scream; and the young man turned slightly pale. Who blames him? Not I.

"Thou wilt not," says I, still holding his shoulder, "say one word to the count of this?"

"N-nay," says he.

" 'Tis well," says I, "because if he knew aught of the intent against him, he might flee his haunts, and make terms with my duke from a distance."

"True," says the young man, thinking.

"So, silence," I admonished him; "and as for this affair within doors here—ah, well, ah, well."

Ask me not, I say, ask me not why I did such a mad piece of business. It was an impulse. It was, so to say, a bud of the vine. I pitied the noble youth because old Paradisa had served him so ill; then again, I was drunk; furthermore, I had lived with a lunatic for a sennight almost. And perhaps—perhaps Pietro's sugar-slop had spattered me.

No matter. I loosed his shoulder, kissed my hand to the girl, and to avoid any thanks, in which he might have announced himself Count of Rodenti and compelled me to cut his throat in accord with my duty—turned and went back into the dining hall.

And lo! Just within the door, I met Pietro, rushing toward me with a face like Satan on a water-spout.

I took him by the shoulder and led him back to where Caterina was standing with her arms outstretched. He seemed sane again; I was stronger than he.

"Now, now," says I, putting my foot on a chair. "A lover's quarrel? Already?"

"Quarrel!" says Pietro, wrenching himself away and laughing bitterly. "Ha-ha-ha! Lovers!"

I looked severely at Caterina.

"How then, madonna," says I, "dost thou not love him?"

"Oh—yes," says she, burying her face in her hands.

Now I looked at Pietro.

"Nay," says this white-faced adorer slowly, "she loves me not, as I have told her; but my counterfeit presentment."

As he paused and stood there trembling and breathing hard through his nose, I stroked my mustache and reflected that ignorance has its uses, after all. Had Pietro been less ignorant, he would have thought nothing of that. All women love counterfeit presentments. No woman ever loved any man save in a character that was not his own. When younger, I used to keep seven different souls on hand, as I did suits, for exhibition to women. Mine own soul I kept hidden—as I do the clothes that actually serve me for battles.

However, I said naught of this to Pietro—then. The time was not propitious.

"Luigi," says he, "hast ever seen me insult a woman before today?"

Ha-ha! I coughed and said nay.

"Nay," says he, while Caterina sobbed. "I have hung about them with flowers, and adoration, and such —— frippery, and doubtless they have mocked me! Mocked me for my gentleness!"

He snatched up a flagon and flung it on the ground, roaring like a bull.

"Steady, lad," says I.

"While I hung about—*her*—with my heart in my mouth," shouts Pietro, "she loved me not! Nay! *Then* she loved this ruffling Lorenzo! To fling her into his arms when she stood hesitating still, I took her this day and treated her like a slave—like a dog! Luigi—tonight I had thought she remembered me as I was before this, and esteemed me the more for that she had seen this contrast. But nay! It is for *this* she loves me! Because I have flouted her, and denied her, and covered her with bruises! I was a man, she says, for the first time tonight!"

Caterina raised her head. Her tears, like her father's, seemed to dry marvelous quick.

"Well, were you not?" she says. "Should a man sigh and langush?"

"Now, peace, peace," says I.

Pietro stared at Caterina, and drew in

his breath as if to say "Now, ——!" But he let the breath out again and shrugged his shoulders as Lorenzo had done.

"Ah, well," says he. "We but multiply words. 'Tis bitter not to be loved, Luigi: but 'tis bitterer to be loved for a wrong reason; to find one's gold rejected, and one's brass taken for good currency in that market. I have been deceived in women."

"Nay?" says I, having told him this very thing twenty thousand several times.

"Aye," says he seriously and, as it were, thoughtfully, still staring at Caterina, who stared back with hard, bright eyes. "I thought they were made by God to bring out the better side of man's nature. But it seems they love worse things than sergeants of horse admire."

He seemed to be talking to himself, and such talking, like inward bleeding, is bad. I poked him in the ribs. He awoke—after a manner—and spoke to Caterina.

"I regret much, madonna," says he, still in that dazed voice, "that I am not what thou hast done me the honor to think. I fear I could not make thee happy—could not beat thee and order thee about like a scullion, and otherwise maltreat thee. I am a soldier by trade, and in my home I should desire peace. This violence today——"

"Is there need for further speech?" says I, pulling him by the arm. "Take or leave, in —— name."

"Aye," says he, still staring.

And then he woke up fully, bowed to Caterina and started out of the dining room with me—grown up at last. We found an old crone in the entrance hall, and the two drunkards of the escort—now sober—outside. To their care we committed the girl, for safe transport to her father's house again.

"We will not go back to Rometia," says I as we mounted in the chill air of near-midnight. "Thy disillusion has come too late to save us from hanging there."

He seemed not to care.

We took the Verona road.

SIXTE

THERE stands Wm. Shakespeare refuted; but after seven months of working at this his trade, God forbid I should gloat upon the poor wretch, much less slit his ears, as was formerly my intention. Like the leper, he suffers more from his own condition than he offends others—none who has not essayed the business can know how an author's fingers ache, how lightnings pass before his eyes, how his back breaks in the middle, how the band is tied around his temples, how the ink runs up his arms even as far as the elbow-joints, how his appetite deserts him, to be replaced by a burning thirst—which, having spent his money upon writing materials, he can not satisfy!

I had sooner work as a mason with blocks of stone, than ever again as writer, raising blocks of truth into a wall, even to shield a friend from the imputation of folly. How it must have been with Shakespeare, who, raising a wall for himself alone, suffered not only from a deficiency of truth for his building, but chose, also, to groin and fanvault the structure with invention, God alone knoweth.

Sure the man hath suffered enough; and after all, he hath made Pietro out but a trifle more a fool than he was. From what had gone before, I myself expected that, like *Petruchio* in the play, my young madman would think a woman frightened into a moment's submission was tamed forever.

Why he did not marry this Caterina as his supposed counterpart did in the play, why there was vouchsafed him a foresight of her renewed outbreaks, of the continual forays to suppress the same, of her desire to be fought over and mastered again in time to come, and of the distraction such warfare would be—why in his blindness, I say, he saw these things and left her as he did, I know not. Perhaps the Almighty is aware of the scarcity of good lieutenants.

If so, I wish He had extended Pietro's enlightenment concerning the girl a little further—particularly, to Messer Lorenzo Tuozzolo; whom, as we entered Verona two days later, we encountered richly dressed (though still bandaged) and looking very eager, riding toward the gate by which we had entered.

He saw us, reined in and smiled. Pietro smiled back at him; they clasped hands. Now, this delighted me strangely, as signifying the end—so I thought—of this most disgustful affair. All through, it had offended me most, that these two fellows, designed by nature for blood brothers, should be at each other's throats over a girl not worthy of either of them. From their handclasp, I received assurance of a future to be peacefully devoted to war.

"Forgive me," says Lorenzo, still holding my lieutenant's hand, while I sat my horse —devoted fool!—beaming upon them, "for the hard names I gave thee in the banquet-hall. I did not know—I did not understand. Not until Caterina's father came over to see mine, and his word was affirmed by the Count of Rodenti, did I know of thy sacrifice for me."

"'Twas nothing," says Pietro.

"But, 'twill bear fruit," says Lorenzo earnestly. "Thy abduction of the girl, and all thy woe, have fulfilled their purpose. She hath overpassed her flightiness; and, in spite of the bitter words I said that night in my ignorance (and for which thou most justly trounced me) she hath confessed she loves me. I ride to Rometia even now, to sign the contracts for a wedding."

The sun, shining into that narrow street, and rebounding in shimmering waves from the cobblestones, was doubtless as warm after he had said that, as before; but to me, it seemed otherwise.

There was a silence, during which, recalling my wits, I pulled at Pietro's arm.

"Come, son," says I, watching his opening mouth as I have watched the approaching heels of a cutthroat while lying wounded in the field. "It gets late."

No use! No use!

"Lorenzo," says my lieutenant, "turn back!"

Their clasped hands dropped apart.

"Pietro—" says I, pulling him again.

"Lorenzo," says he, heedless alike of my urging and of Tuozzolo's clouding face. "Have naught to do with that woman. It is my place to beg thy forgiveness, for that I struck thee when thou reviled her."

What a nose for trouble have the common people—the commoner, the keener! All of a sudden, without a move made, without a voice raised above speaking tone, our party became the center of a crowd.

"What is this?" says Lorenzo, through his teeth."

"I tell thee," says Pietro, "that she is a heartless——"

"What? Dost thou——"

"A sensation-desiring——"

"Liar!"

"—fickle——"

"Liar!"

"I do this for thy benefit, thou fool! She——"

"Wilt thou not be silent? There, then!"

Lorenzo leaned over and struck Pietro in the mouth, and the next instant, for the third time, for the third reason, they were fighting, again. As they had been when they both loved the girl; as they had been when Lorenzo loved her not; so now again, since Pietro detested her, they scrimmaged for each other's blood—hither and yon—thrust and parry—cloak and dagger—sparks flying from the cobble street ringing with steel—myself shoved, poked, cursed, and thrust around when I tried to separate them—the populace shouting, running into each other, yelling for the watch—fruit baskets, flower baskets, egg baskets upset in the advance and retreat of those furious young lunatics—a cut down Lorenzo's wedding-suit—Pietro's hat shorn off—and at last a yell of "Peace! In the name of his Highness the Duke!", and the watch with leveled arquebuses. They would have fought on, even so; but the shout made them pause for an instant; and in that instant, I knocked their fools' heads together and stunned them.

It seemed there was an edict against fighting in the public streets. It seemed that their duke had a spite against ours, for which, being broad-minded, I thanked God. We were clapped in prison, Pietro and I, during the duke's pleasure, to be sure; but if we had been handed back to our own master for punishment, as is usual——

SEPTIME

IT SEEMS that the Duke of Verona is going to war, and needs a captain and a lieutenant, for a troop of horse. And so ends this imbroglio; happily; Pietro cured of his foolishness forever——

OCTAVE

O PERRENIAL folly of man!

O solitary animal that doth not learn by experience!

As I wrote those words, I heard Pietro, in the next cell, betokening his coming release by singing—

Love songs!

Too Much Magic

by Thomas Topham

Author of "One Young, One Widow, One Old," "Captain Tookle Tames a Queen," etc.

OCT. 23 (Tues) Worked hard all day bossing the houseing-in of part of the ship to keep off the snow. To bad the *Annie Ross* froze in at a list. Had hard time keeping the hands at work because of the cold but made them stick it out. 18° below outside, 33° above in cabin. Sun almost gone.

Oct. 24 (Wed) Capt Ross & me have ben disputing about our position off Greenland coast. Am certain we are near Inglefeld Gulf about 120 or 125 mi. S. of Etah. He thinks we just rounded C. Parry before we froze in. Guess we see last of sun yesterday. Cloudy today, could not get sight of sun. Wish Capt Ross had left his wife at home. She come running up to me today & says Alex Hamilton Timmons are you or are you not chief mate on this boat. Mrs. Cap Eph I says I am. Well then she says you had best lock up the ships alcohol & keep the key or Capt Ross will stay pickeled all winter so I did as she says & I have the key. Mrs. Cap Eph is very bossie & ought to ben a man. Took one little swigg of alcohol & water tonight to keep off the cold. Could hear Capt Ross hunting around for the key but lied out of it when he asked me. 25° below outside, 30° in cabin. Gale blowing.

Oct. 25 (Thurs) Sure is —— to be froze in. Could cut Mrs. Cap Ephs throat every time I think how she get us in this pickel by making the skipper go North when he had ought to ben going South. Ship like big ice box. Ice on cabin walls. Had breakfast of bear meat, cook cooked it with bear fat, tasted like the ——. Gave cook good trimming, showed him how to cook bear meat so it would not taste so terribel. Capt Ross very cranky & heard him & Mrs. Cap Eph fussing. Worked all day trying to rigg up a better stove in my cabin but they aint no stove can do much good up here. To —— cold to write. 22° above in cabin now, which is warm up here.

Oct. 26 (Fri) Dropped chew of tobaco out of my mouth tonight in cabin. It was froze solid when I went to pick it up. Took temperature on floor, was —1° & was 29° above at level of my shoulder. Thawed out the chew as tobaco cant be got up here & we have not got any to much. —31° outside.

Oct. 28 (Sun) Capt Ross held church again, he being very relegeous. Spent yesterday fixing up igloo where we keep supplys in case ship is crushed by the ice. Bear had broke in & had a good time. Ripped open boxes, eat some salt horse. Had heard bears would not touch salt meat which is a lie. Chased the bear but was drove back by a snowstorm. Froze nose before I knew it. Thawed nose. —22° outside, 16° inside. Stove rotten.

Oct. 29 (Mon) Spent today hunting bear, which is hanging around. He chased one of the hands clear to ship but I could not get rifle working in time & he gets away in the dark. Warmer today. 28° in cabin, 13° below on deck.

Oct. 31 (Wed) 4 Eskimos come over to

ship from settlement about 6 mi. away. Kitinga* whose a big hunter wanted me to go South on a hunt but Capt Ross refused to let me go. Old mans afraid I will get killd & he cant get out of ice, he would not give a —— if I fell overboard if we was back off U. S. coast. Glad I learnt eskimo language when North before, I am picking it up again & talk like I was born up here. Fed each Eskimo one (1) spoonful of mollasses. Gosh how they did lick there lips. They look funny eating mollasses they shut there eyes & open there mouthes & let me stick it in there mouthes. Used same spoon for all but no objections. Result, 16 come over in hour after they left & hung around hoping to get mollasses. I drove them off, told them to beat it in eskimo. —31° outside.

Nov. 1 & 2 (Thurs & Fri) Shipbound all day yesterday. Heavy wind drove snow all round. Looked like it was snowing but just wind blowing snow. —42° outside. 20° inside.

Nov. 3 (Sat) Cleaned my rifle, still storming. Heavy drifts piling up.

Nov. 4 (Sun) Capt Ross held church. Had pie for dinner. Old man prayed like a son of a gun for the Lord to let the ice break & let the *Annie Ross* get out. Fat chance. Skipper called Lords attention to Egiptians crossing Red Sea, said it would not be any harder to break the ice up here, in fact not so hard. Old man sort of got me going so I went out & looked at the ice but no sign of a break. Frosted my nose again a little. 20° above zero in cabin, so it was warm in here so to speak. 20° below on deck.

Nov. 5 (Mon) Big aurora last night. No light in day except faint glow in direction of sun.

Nov. 6 (Tues) Ben hunting hares for fresh meat. Got a few but they are hard to see again snow. Busy most of day clearing slush out of cabin & drying out. Had warm spell, weather went up suddenly to 2° outside & ice on cabin walls melted. Had —— of a time with everything wet & then freezing up. Had to chop watch out of pocket.

Nov. 8 (Thurs) Had trobbel with a eskimo. Went over to our igloo on shore & was surprised to find it open, snow block taken out. Crawled in & threw light around. See a big eskimo named Arootsack† taking a snooze inside. Had stuffed himself full of our eats, opened a lot of boxes. Kicked him out in the snow before he was awake, cussed him & told him I would do worse than kick his pants next time. —15° outside, nice & comfortable in.

Nov. 9 (Fri) Me kicking Arootsack has stirred up one —— of a row. Arootsack hates whites & is a pretty mean guy from what I hear. Big bird named Kitinga is friendly to us & tells me Arootsack is trying to get eskimos to massacer us & take the ship. Such things has ben did before by eskimos. The eskimos about evenly divided I have set watch at all times on ship but the men get cold, come in to get warm, so am thinking of having doubel watch. Kitinga is a good friend of ours & offered to take Arootsack out seal hunting & harpoon him but I told him not to, like to do the job myself some day if he starts anything. Fairly warm, 10° above on cabin floor, 45° above 6 ft. up, 32° below outside. Dark all day.

Nov. 10 (Sat) Had walrus for breakfast, dinner & supper. To —— much walrus but skipper has on a saving streak & was afraid it would spoil. Up here where the hotest place is about 32°. Men complained walrus tasted bad. It did, sort of like medicin, but it is about all we have in the way of fresh meat & it aint so fresh. Pitchy dark all day. Mrs. Cap Eph took a look at the sky today, grunted & said it was getting lighter every day. Little she knows it is getting darker & darker.

Nov. 11 (Sun) Capt. Ross held church. Had bunch of eskimos over to ship tonight, fed them spoonfull of mollasses apeace & showed them tricks in hope of jollying them up & making them feel better towards us. Made Kitinga bring along Arootsack & his pals who have been plotting again us. Showed them what a big magican I am. Showed them a trick I learnt from a French sailor at Hong kong of taking things out of a hat. Got one of the skippers old derby hats, showed how he wore it because they had never saw one before. Then I showed them it was empty & then I took out a handfull of biscuits from the empty hat & threw them into the crowd for them to eat & then poured mollasses into the hat & then showed them there was not no mollasses in the hat. They sure opened there eyes. They like to stampeded when I pulled biscuits out of there ears. I wanted them to think I was big medecin so Arootsack would be afraid to meddle with us. When they left I give each one a spoonful of mollasses.

*Kyutinguah. †Arrutsack.

Funny how they shut there eyes & opened there mouths to take the mollasses. Mrs. Cap Eph said it was terribel to use the same spoon for one & all but I showed her how clean each one licked it so as not to leave no mollasses for the next one. Pretty warm in cabin tonight. Got the stove working better. 12° above on floor, 52° above on top of my desk. Getting colder outside.

Nov. 12 (Mon) Capt Ross froze his cheek & big toe today. Insisted on thawing them with snow tho I told him it was wrong. He said his father & grandfather done it in New England. Result, big sore on cheëk where skin come off & big toe swelld up. Canot make him understand that only way to thaw out is to warm up. —25° outside.

Nov. 13 (Tues) Spent today trying to fish rifle from water, lost in a hole in the ice but failed. Cold. 20° above in cabin. Am now sleeping in my cloths & aint had no bathe for two (2) months.

Nov. 14 (Wed) Kitinga our eskimo friend, told me today that the reguler magican Siptoo (dont know how to spell it) is sore about me showing off my tricks. Thinks I am trying to put him on the bum as a magican. Says one of the eskimos who see me take biscuits out of the hat told Siptoo if he would take things to eat out of his kuletar (hat) they would not have to hunt so hard. Kitinga says Siptoo & Arootsack have been holding a pow wow which looks bad for us. They are up to some devil-tryment. Kitinga ended up by asking me to dig some mollasses out of my kuletar for him & seemed kind of put out when I didnt. Brought him over to the ship & give him about a lb. of butter that he eat on the spot & went away grinning with butter all over his face & in his ears. Put 2 men on watch tonight, one hour each, off & on, so they can warm up. Cloudy all day.

Nov. 15 (Thurs) Have been chopping ice off ship. Put hands to work building ice stairs from ship to make it easier for Mrs. Cap Eph.

Nov. 17 (Sat) Knocked out 2 of crew who was stirring up mutiny. They planned to take sledges & dogs from eskimos & start South.

Nov. 26 (Mon) Laid up for 10 days with frozen hand due to Capt Ross. The old man started over to our igloo on shore. When a little ways from the ship saw something, thought it was me or one of the hands & walked up to it. It was a polar bear. Capt. let out a yell & beat it with bear close behind. Lucky for him we had built ice stairs, he come up in a whoop. Bear come up to but Capt. got in cabin & bear was having a high time when the men called me. My rifle jammed & I took off glove to fix it & froze hand but shot the bear behind his ear while he was noseing a pile of skins on deck. Bitter cold. Am writing with book on top of stove. Door 18 in. away is coated with ice.

Nov. 30 (Fri) Still bitter cold. Thermometer outside went to 50° below & stuck there. Arootsack surprised me today by coming over & telling me he had found a carn.* North about 20 mi. Thinks it was left there by explorers but was afraid to touch it because of evil spirets. Seemed to be anxous for me to go up. I dont trust Arootsack but as it is moonlight think I'll go. Figure it might be carn left by some party which was lost around here years ago. Heavy wind.

Dec. 1 (Sat) Talked with Kitinga about carn. He says there aint none, but think I will go anyway, Have ben sick all day from eating bear liver. Eskimos told me not to, said it was poison but did not believe them. Sure was sick. Did not go out to read weather. 30 above in here.

Dec. 5 (Wed) Got a busted thum. Glad its on my left hand. Decided to go with Arootsack to see the carn he found. He took Siptoo the magican, along. Packed one sledge & lit out. Sure was a boob to go with them 2. Should have took Kitingas advise but thought maybe Arootsack & Siptoo was trying to get friendly & planned to show Siptoo some tricks so he could fool himself back into poplar favour with his gang. Found the carn but somebody else had ben their, was only old empty bottle in it. Maybe their had ben a letter or something in it once. While we was at carn & I was bending down to examine it, caught a sight of Arootsack aiming seal harpoon at me. Then it struck me Siptoo & Arootsack had brought me up there to kill me, being sore at me. Jumped & harpoon barely missed. Just as I jumped seen Siptoo aiming another from other side. Hit him with gun, clubbed & knocked him down but dropped the gun. Arootsack was running up with a big knife so I hit him in the mouth with my fist. Busted my thum on his

* Cairn.

teeth. Beat them with dog whip till they yelled bloody murder. Am glad they did-not have rifles or I would have ben did for. Made them both run with the dogs all the way back while I rode. I will watch them 2 eskimos close from now on. Awful cold tho cabin stove drawing good & comforteble in here. 40° above. Put left thum in splints. Its pretty sore but Arootsack is out a couple of teeth. Siptoos head is cut bad. Skipper sewed it up for him with a piece of narwhal thread. Hope it poisons him. Warned men on watch to keep sharp lookout. —31° outside.

Dec. 8 (Sat) Ben building sledge. Cant use nailes for they wont hold going over rough ice & lashing them up with thong is one —— of a job, also with a busted thum. Am thinking of trying to get Capt Ross to let me take him & Mrs. Cap Eph South to trading post on North star bay I have heard of, then coming back & sticking with the *Annie Ross* till the ice breaks up. The skipper aint no good up here anyway. —39° on deck.

Dec. 9 (Sun) Capt. Ross held church, preyed for guidance on whether or not to quit the ship, went outside & got a whiff of the air & come back. Said he thought the Lord wanted him to stick to the ship. The old —— is also afraide I might claim he abandoned the ship & demand salvage but mostly he is afraide he would freeze to death on the sledge. Terribel storm coming on. Never saw anything like it. The ship shakes & rocks in the ice & I am even afraide it will be torn up. Big chunks of ice come tumbling down from the rigging & almost smash thro the deck.

Dec. 10 (Mon) Much trubble going on at eskimo settlement between Kitinga & Arootsack gangs. Arootsack come home from our trip to the carn & beat up a couple of his wifes to get even for losing his teeth. Kitinga butted in which seems to be a deadly insult between Eskimos. He told me that Arootsack is crazy mad & is telling it about how he & his gang will murder all of us & get the ship. Come on, you Arootsack, I will knock out all your teeth next time & kick you off the ship. —34° outside. 28° in.

Dec. 11 (Tues) Think I have got mixed in my dates. Capt. Ross checked up today & swore it was Sunday. Maybe so. It would have suited me but the old hipocrit insisted on holding church today again to be sure. Result, we will have services twice every week, Sunday (my reckoning) & Tuesday (his reckoning) Hard to keep track of dates when it is dark all the time. —38° on deck. 35° inside cabin. Took temperture in Capt Ross cabin, it was 57° he will burn up the ship if he dont watch out.

Dec. 13 (Thurs) Kitinga come over & said things very bad at eskimo joint. Siptoo is backing Arootsack to the limit & is prepairing a spell to make them proof against bullets if they rush the ship. Better make a —— good charm while he is at it. Built sentry box on deck put in stove & doubled the watch. 10° above in sentry box. 36° above in cabin.

Dec. 14. (Fri) Thick, snowy, dark weather. This is a —— of a climate. —42° below zero. Very uncomforteble.

Dec. 15 (Sat) Kitinga is planning a hunt to Ellesmer land. He is desperit for meat & thinks he can get some bear. Wants me to go but as Arootsack is not going to go am afraid to leave the ship. Kitinga says an eskimo told him ice has formed on Smith Sound & he can get across & is only waiting for clear moonlight weather. I think Kitinga is afraide of Arootsack & his gang & wants to get away. He is going to take along women which looks suspicous.

Dec. 16 (Sun) Capt Ross held church. Somebody slid a large chunk of ice down on Mrs. Cap Eph today while she was walking along the shore. I suspicion Arootsack the dirty sneak. He is one of them dirty kind that dont come out in the open.

Dec. 17 (Mon) Have decided to kill Arootsack to settle this matter. Have not decided how. Best way would be to snare him out on the ice, shoot him & push his body in a seal hole. Another way would be give him poisoned mollasses. But it must be did for the good of the ship, unless I can put the fear of God into him some other way. —44° outside. 20° inside.

Dec. 18 (Tues. my reckoning, Sun. Capt Ross) Am watching Arootsack very close when he is around. Eskimos never attack face to face, it aint considered polite to dive in & fight a man but kill him when his back is turned. So I am watching Arootsack, that old eskimo will have to do some tall circling to get back of me. Awful cold. Capt Ross held church to be sure, this being his Sunday. Am staying in as much as possible.

Dec. 24 (Mon) Xmas eve!!! Gosh almighty what a Xmas eve. If ever I get out

I swear I never come North of 50 & maybe not that far. Got out some alcohol & mixed up some very cheesy drinks, then called in Capt Ross & he got stewed so put him to bed & whooped up his fire to keep him from freezing to death. Am going to take a swigg now & go to bed. What a life. Don't know how cold it is.

Dec. 25 (Tues) Xmas day. Capt Ross held church. Felt kind of sorry for the old man & Mrs. Cap Eph. We give each other some presents, mostly things we had got from the eskimos like carved bone etc & talked about Xmas back home. Decided to go with Kitinga to Ellesmer land as we must have meat. We leave when it is moonlight. Our Xmas dinner was nothing to brag about tho the cook done his best. Started tonight to fix up my clothes for the trip. 35° below outside. 33° above in.

Jan 5 (Sat) Have been working hard getting things in shape on the ship so I can leave for the hunt. Have my cloths all ready, including a new pair of bearskin pants. Have took my supplies down to settlement for Kitinga to pack on the sledges. Clear moonlight weather means we are off. —23 on deck.

Jan 9 (Wed) Am not going to Ellesmer land. Started but back disgusted as —— Relied upon Kitinga to pack the sledges. Six eskimos went with us, 3 sledges. Thought sledges looked sort of light but said nothing. Travelled 8 hours, heavy going camped & found Kitinga had not brought along supplys. The idot said he thought I could take enough things out of my hat to eat & it was much easier than sledging all the stuff. Gave Kitinga ——, but still did not tell him it was a trick. Told him I had to have my charm along which I said I did not bring along.

Jan. 10 (Thurs) Kitinga & his gang packed up & left today. Before he left I give him and ole rifle & considerable cartridges & he almost cried. He aint had a gun for years. Used his last gun to beat dogs after his bullets give out till he finaly lost it. He is not such a bad scout but terribel simple minded. Decided I had better stay with the ship as 2 of men are down with scurvy. Not enough fresh meat but I think I can get some haires. Made everybody get out & exercise, even Capt Ross who lays around his stove all the time.

Jan. 11 (Fri) Good thing I staid with the ship. Caught Aroostack & Siptoo hanging about the ship today. Booted Arootsack & told him to keep away or I would put a bullet clear through him. He was sassy & sneered when I talked about shooting him. Think hes relying on his magic made by Siptoo to make the bullets harmless. He better not. Made me new pair of gloves today. Weather —22° outside. 41° inside. Clear.

Jan. 13 (Sun) Capt. Ross held church. Arootsack & Siptoo uprising is over & Arootsack is one sick eskimo. Capt Ross, Mrs. Cap Eph & me with the second mate was setting down to supper last night when in bursts Arootsack, Siptoo & two other eskimos. Arootsack had a gun he stole from us & Siptoo & the rest had harpoons & knives. Of course the men on watch had sneaked off to get warm & they had sneaked onto the ship. Looked bad but I keep a stiff upper lip, aiming to go after Siptoo first & put him & his magic out with a butcher knife if possible first. I told them all to beat it while they was together but they did not.

Arootsack talked back to me in eskimo & said he & his friends was only paying a call but I could see he was stalling for a opening to begin cutting us up, so I say, very polite, will him & his friends have some mollasses. He couldnot stand the pressure & I guess he thought he might as well eat some then to be sure he got it & kill us afterwards. So I dipped up a tablespoonfull & held it out. Arootsack shuts his eyes & opens his mouth like they all do & I chuck in the mollasses. I do it again. He opens his trap the 3rd time & when he gets this dose he opens his eyes quick & sudden & sort of surprised like, then he done flip flops all over the cabin & hops yelling bloody murder out the door & if the door had not of opened outwards he would never got out. So I booted Siptoo & the other 2 out after him, them having nothing but knives & harpoons & I go out to see what has became of Arootsack.

There he is, down on all fours like a dog, biting up mouthfulls of snow to squelch that tablespoonful of tobasco sauce I had heaved in his mouth the 3rd time instead of the mollasses. So the uprising is over. —29° outside. 42° above in my cabin.

The Homesteaders

A Five-Part Story —Part I

by Hugh Pendexter

Author of "Iroquois! Iroquois!" "Rifle Rule," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

WHEN Alonzo Fall and his family arrived in the southwestern part of Blue Earth County, Minnesota, in the autumn of 1859, bringing their few household goods in an ox-drawn cart, they were quite convinced that their thirty days of arduous travel from Oshkosh, Wisconsin, had landed them at the edge of the world. Mrs. Fall was more sensitive to the new environment than were her two children or her husband. She could conceive of no locality more lonely and isolated than this homestead. She endeavored to hide her homesickness even while telling herself it was the jumping-off place into nothingness.

There was no denying that their log house, with sods over the roof-poles to keep out the rain—later sowed with pop-corn by Mrs. Fall—commanded an empty view if one hungered for human companionship. In no direction could she see a house or a chimney smoke. Murray, the son, seventeen years old, discovered the meaning of loneliness as expressed by his favorite hero, *Robinson Crusoe.* But he was not oppressed as was his mother. He worked much beside his father. When alone he dramatized himself into his surroundings.

The year had been peculiarly disagreeable in Wisconsin, with a hard frost in each summer month. The corn was frost-bitten, and the other crops were scant or spoiled. When the family commenced its thirty days' migration—soon to be covered in twelve hours—it left behind a vegetation brown and dead. Heavy rains in the new land had defied the frost, and the journey had ended in fresh green foliage that rivaled the verdure of spring. Only there soon came to each the feeling they were the only people on earth to enjoy it.

Mr. Fall had known before seeking a new home that the southern parts of Blue Earth and Waseca Counties had been scarcely touched by cultivation. Yet even he, naturally optimistic, had been nonplused on beholding the rolling prairies and the wild grass standing head-high in many places. He had learned also from those who had visited the country that there were scarcely any settlers west of a line extending from the mouth of the Redwood River to the southeastern corner of Faribault County with the exception of a few on the Watonwan, the Minnesota, the Des Moines, and the Rock Rivers, and on the Chain Lakes and Lake Shetek. But he appeared to be surprized by the fact and went about his first work with much shaking of the head, as if he could not understand the phenomenon of being alone.

The Falls had entered a new world and had penetrated somewhat beyond the border when they crossed the Blue Earth River thirty miles above the Iowa line. After leaving the river they traveled eight or ten miles southwest. When they stopped

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a night at the Cray farm they were told they had reached the outposts of white homes. Murray begged his father to homestead beside the hospitable family because Lorin Cray, a youth in his 'teens, had gained his liking on sight. After a talk with Mr. Cray, Fall decided to move on a mile or two.

After the house was up and made weather tight the miracle began to happen. In a country outside the ken of any human habitation, with the little girl Alice hidden from view in the tall grass a few rods from the door, with the passenger-pigeons crying: "*Pigie! Pigie!*" as they obscured the sun in their flights, the family suddenly found themselves possessed of several neighbors. When one goes into the forest and sees no signs of life he has only to remain quiet soon to find timid folks accepting him as inanimate and coming from hiding to play around him. Crudely parallel was the Fall family's experience after the first shock of isolation. Kindly people began appearing from nowhere to give them a hearty welcome and wish them well.

One of their first callers was Peter Clush, an elderly man, who had quit soldiering at Fort Snelling in 'forty-three to go back East. But some appeal of the wide, open spaces had captured him and held him; and there he was coming out of the grass to get acquainted. He had resurrected his old uniform in honor of the occasion. He created a sensation when he suddenly appeared, clothed in blue and a wealth of brass buttons, with a high, bell-topped blue cap surmounted by a leather bridle setting jauntily on his gray hair. To Murray he looked like an American soldier who had stepped out of an illustration of the Mexican War.

He lived three miles north of the Falls. He boasted of raising wheat from seed secured from the craw of a wild swan he had shot. The swan, he added, presumably came from the Pembina country on the Red River of the North. He was very particular to explain that the first seed antedated the coming of the first missionaries. It was he who introduced the Falls to the enjoyment of boned and dried beaver tails, such as H. H. Sibley had received by the thousands each year when serving as agent for the American Fur Company in the vast Northwest section.

Out of the tall wild grass came "Mad Martha," a woman of perhaps twenty-five years, but looking older because of streaks of gray in her hair and a certain wildness in her big, dark eyes. She was eccentric but not insane. The stern features could relax in gentleness, and she quickly endeared herself to Mrs. Fall by her affection for the girl Alice. Possibly her nickname resulted from her habit of carrying a bow and a quiver of arrows, in the use of which she was most proficient.

She introduced herself by briefly relating her tragic history. Indians had murdered her parents near Sauk Center on the old Red River Trail nearly a score of years back. For some reason she had been spared and not even taken a captive and had been found beside the dead man and woman by Red River drivers bringing down their squawking carts of furs. She knew her first name, but that was all; and throughout the years she had roamed the country, at home as much as any wild thing, and was known only as Martha.

She had her great problem in life: To learn if Sioux or Chippewas killed her parents. She never said what she should do when she learned the truth, but old frontier men said the arrows were war arrows. She had been brought up by a settler who lived near Old Shakopee's village on the Minnesota and quickly rivaled the Indian boys in skill with the bow.

There was something quite terrible in her placid voice as she told her story and explained her quest for the red murderers. When she talked of the tragedy her eyes grew very round and were filled with a feral light, but her voice remained quiet and composed and no different in tone from when she was discussing a new dress for Alice. Mrs. Fall was afraid of her at first and then grew to rely on her.

There was no knowing when she would come or go. She never said good-by. She was gone before the family was up. Their first knowledge of her arrival was when they heard her picketing her horse in the darkness, or saw her head bobbing above the tall grass. She had no fixed abode that the Falls could ever learn. From her talk they knew she sometimes slept in Indian lodges, and they soon learned that the Indians feared her.

From out of the empty, billowy country came Papa Baptiste. He walked in on the family one noon without knocking, like an Indian, and took his place at the table.

He was dressed in fringed buckskin and wore his hair long, but was clean-shaven. His face was dark as a Chippewa's and much seamed and wrinkled. He had a red-and-yellow sash around his waist and undoubtedly was a mixed blood. He spoke English, but when excited jabbered in

French mixed with guttural Indian terms. It was Papa Baptiste who taught Murray to overcome the scarcity of lead by using dried peas for shooting prairie chickens and the like.

And out of the grassy sea in the south came old man Pollacker, huge and hairy and vastly proud of his strength. With him came his sons, Bert and Ed. Murray liked them both, but grew to be especially fond of Ed, wild and harumscarum when sober and filled with laughing deviltry when in drink.

"Codfish" Billings, a homesteader from New England, came on a Sunday morning, his shrewd, calculating gaze taking in every detail of the new home before he had finished making himself known. He was called "Codfish" from his often expressed desire to get back to the coast where he could enjoy his favorite sea food. Mrs. Fall, also yearning for the East, was unusually sympathetic in listening to Billings.

And there were Indians aplenty, although the four divisions of the Sioux—Sisseton, Wahpeton, Wahpekute, and Mdewakanton—were supposed to remain on the reservation, according to the treaty stipulations agreed to in 'fifty-one at Traverse des Sioux. But they wandered and begged where they would.

Sometimes Martha would appear when Indians were camped near the homestead, or, if few in number, were making themselves at home in the house. Invariably the eccentric woman's arrival was the signal for the aborigines to depart. At first Mrs. Fall thought her strange friend came to drive the Sioux away, and that conviction induced fear. Martha was quick to reassure her, saying:

"It's only the Wahpekute bands I'm interested in. They are stupid and lazy. Yet they were the ones who killed white folks at Spirit Lake in 'fifty-seven. Inkpaduta was their leader. It's the Wahpekute that makes me think Sioux men might have killed my folks instead of the Chippewa. I want to talk with them and ask questions, but they always run away."

And as she talked softly and a bit sorrowfully her eyes would grow big and the gaze fixed, and Mrs. Fall would shiver and hurriedly arouse her from the mood. It was in this way that the Falls learned the Indians were uneasy in Martha's presence.

ONE of Murray's first thrills in the lonely land came on a bright moonlight night when he was aroused by a creaking, grinding noise that made him think of the Red River carts Papa Baptiste had told him about. Peering from the little window under the eaves in the loft, he beheld a small band of Sioux using his father's grindstone, each taking his turn to sharpen a butcher knife. Where they came from and whither they were bound he never knew although he often speculated on their errand, and wondered if the grindstone had advanced their quest.

Mr. Fall persisted in attributing the white man's mental qualities to these straggling bands, and had many a warm argument with Papa Baptiste, who excitedly declared an Indian was an Indian and could not be appraised by white standards. Mrs. Fall feared the Sioux, and at first it amused them to frighten her. Fingers playing with the handle of a knife, ferocious scowls crinkling a painted face, was the extent of their intimidation, but it was sufficient. A simple thing won for her a bit of respect. While several Sisseton men, who thirteen years before claimed all country west of the Blue Earth River as

far as the James River in Dakota, were lounging near the door a gust of wind blew Alice's hat into the tall grass. The child could not tell where the hat disappeared, and the Indians refused any information. Mrs. Fall hunted a few minutes, then went into the house and brought out the child's bonnet of flimsy straw and gave it to the next gust tearing around the house. Mrs. Fall ran after it and recovered it where the grass stood to her shoulders and within a few feet found the hat. The red men appreciated the white woman's quick wit and nodded approval.

Other border women got used to the Indians, but not Mrs. Fall. They always remained something alien. She declared it made her ill when she went out in the morning and found their tracks close to the cabin where she had turned the sod for flower beds. It was only by a great effort that she could pretend ignorement of their presence when their heads blocked the light at the window. She minded this silent spying even more than their habit of silently entering the house and squatting on the floor.

Sometimes, when alone with her husband, she would break down for a few minutes and bitterly resent the stealthy espionage. For some time she could not look at a hideously painted face without shuddering.

She found her courage when a Sioux stalked in while she was giving the child Alice a bath. His face was green on one side and white on the other, with black lines extending from ear to ear. He had barely entered before he was running away with the angry mother pursuing him with a small kettle of boiling water. This man was Little Crow, chief of the Kaposia band of Mdewakanton Sioux. He told of the incident, praised the white squaw's bravery and gave her the name of "Little Hornet," by which she was known among the Indians. After that her fears dropped from her, although she never could feel at ease when hunters stole in behind her back and squatted on the floor, their beady eyes watching her.

On one occasion a squaw was brought to the house, bleeding at the nose. Fall was unable to check the hemorrhage. In desperation Mrs. Fall whittled two pine plugs, and these stopped the bleeding. After that she was not only known as Little Hornet but also credited with being a medicine woman. She knew nothing of her growing reputation until Martha told her.

She continued to conceal the homesickness in her heart. She shivered when hearing the lonely song of the whippoorwill. When outdoors her gaze turned instinctively toward the east.

There was always the fear that the Indians would steal Alice. The last was prompted by the Indians' admiration for the child, the big blue eyes and soft, light hair seeming to fascinate them. When she passed near a squatting buck a hand would reach out and stroke her hair. The mother assumed the Indian was yearning to scalp the child.

Unlike her mother, the child had no fear of red visitors. She would play with the handle of a belted knife, persist in opening the tobacco bag and curiously examine the hair ornaments of tin and brass.

The lonely woman's great refuge was Mad Martha. The sun seemed to be shining brightly, no matter how heavily the outside world might be storming, when Martha came riding through the grass, sitting astride, with men's boots on her feet, her gray-streaked hair disordered by the wind and wet with rain. Martha worshiped the little girl and whittled out canoes and tiny bows and arrows for her. And she taught the mother how to make lavender dye out of the blue paper that came around large cones of sugar. Martha could outstare Little Crow or Cut Nose, yet her gaze was more speculative than revengeful. Sometimes she would break a bit of silence by telling Mrs. Fall—

"The day comes when I shall know the truth."

"Lor', Martha! I don't believe that will be a good day. It's best you shouldn't know."

"Oh, I must know some day," she would softly correct.

"But to what good? What'll you do, Martha?"

And the eccentric would tap her unstrung bow and smile grimly.

MURRAY was a boy when he started from Oshkosh. He was a man when he reached the Blue Earth country. The nearest neighbors were the three Pollackers, who lived a mile to the south. The Crays were two miles to the east. Peter Clush had a sod shanty somewhere

to the west but was seldom at home to receive visitors. Like Papa Baptiste he came and went without definite purpose and earned scanty wages digging ginseng, working at harvesting for a few days, or hunting and trapping. No task could hold him after he had satisfied his immediate needs.

Martha was continually riding from the Minnesota River down through the Blue Earth country to the Iowa line, seemingly also without purpose. In a radius of five miles there were but four families.

The first winter was especially hard on Mrs. Fall and the girl. They lived largely on potatoes, corn and milk. They had no flour. Martha often contributed small game shot with arrows. Peter Clush seldom came without bringing something for the larder, but he invariably ate more than he brought, and did not, as Murray expressed it, "break even." The arrival of Papa Baptiste was always an event. Once his red-and-yellow sash were seen Alice would gleefully exclaim:

"Meat! Meat! Here comes the meat man."

And it was seldom that Baptiste disappointed her. His dark, wrinkled face would twist into a broad grin as he pretended to make a mystery of what he had brought.

"*Eh, bien, m'mselle!* Where is the red that must be in the cheek? Papa Baptiste will paint you up," he would cry.

One terrible winter day, when food was very low, he came dragging a frozen deer on a low sled. It was after midnight before the feasting ended.

The Falls were pained, however, when they discovered that Baptiste either disliked or feared Martha. If she came when he was there he was sure to bring his visit to an end. When the two first met at the Fall home she stared at him thoughtfully and queried:

"Part red, ain't you? Sioux or Chippewa?"

Removing his skin hat and bowing low, he murmured:

"A bit of Chippewa blood on my grandmother's side, it is said. But I feel all French, *m'm'selle.*"

And he walked from the house and went away.

The Falls had no wheat and fattened no hogs until the second year. Their only connection with the outside world was an occasional trip to Shelbyville on the Blue Earth River, some eight miles away.

A weekly stage brought the mail to Blue Earth and Faribault Counties. No newspapers were taken west of the river. If the homesteaders would learn something of the tumultuous piling up of climaxes east of the Mississippi they traveled to Shelbyville and listened while the postmaster read aloud from a weekly St. Paul paper.

In the spring of 'sixty a log schoolhouse was erected near the Cray home, and religious services were occasionally held there. Murray and some of the men attended these services barefooted. When Mrs. Fall prepared to hear the first preaching she fixed over her wedding dress of light and dark blue delaine and brought from her trunk six-button shoes of blue cloth and a bonnet with roses on the flat sides, and a cape of lutestring.

Murray and Alice worshiped the sweet picture she presented as she stood before them, elated as a child herself at their storm of praise. Then she grew sober and older of face as she became acutely conscious of Murray's bare feet and her husband's rough clothes. When she reappeared from behind the curtain that separated one corner into a bedroom she had on her denim gown, and it was that which she wore to the service.

When Murray would complain over the monotonous round of hard work his mother would smile bravely and put aside her own loneliness even as she had put away the wedding finery. And she would endeavor to make him see the vital drama that was characterizing this development of a new State, a commonwealth greater in area than all New England, magnificent in resources. She told him how its settlement had been prepared by the territorial act of 1849, with the country around St. Paul—first called "Pig's Eye"—receiving the first homemakers. She tried to stimulate his imagination so he could visualize the tide of the land-hungry engulfing Mendota, Fort Snelling, St. Anthony's Falls and Stillwater, while the more venturesome advanced up the Minnesota River and were annoyed at finding the Indians ahead of them.

She told him how the treaty of 'fifty-one had removed these red briers by confining them to the ten-mile-wide strip along the river. She made him see something of the white migration, first creeping and hesitant,

then pouring along in an unceasing stream.

But it did not dispel Murray's sense of isolation even though the population had jumped from four thousand in 'forty-nine to nearly two hundred thousand in 1860. Surely but few of these many settlers were in Blue Earth County! Surely his part in developing the new State contained nothing of adventure and romance.

Papa Baptiste told him stories that fired his blood; but they were stories of the Red River of the North, of the Pembina country. He was unable to find solace for his lonely hours in visioning many homes and industries ultimately surrounding his home. No more could his mother dramatize herself into the onward movement so long as her neighbors appeared from nowhere and vanished in the tall grass into nowhere over the first swell of the undulating prairie land.

In truth the little mother was more of a prisoner than her husband or the children. Alice attended school. Fall and the boy found diversion and thrills in listening to the postmaster read from the weekly paper. Political clashes and stupendous threats of splitting the Union reechoed ominously, but lost much of realism when droned forth by the postmaster in the same voice he used in reading the price of logs. Without change of tone he passed from President Buchanan's mischievous disunion message to river conditions below Lake Pepin.

Even less real was the news from the outside world when briefly condensed by Fall while his wife was trying to remember Mad Martha's Indian remedy for the "prairie dig," or itch, that seemed to emanate from raw, new land.

In the summer of 'sixty the postmaster read about Senator Crittenden's proposed amendment to the Constitution that would reestablish the Missouri Compromise. But the summer was memorable to Murray Fall by Peter Clush's gift of a broken bugle. The year closed with Major Anderson at Fort Sumter and with South Carolina openly determined to seize that fortification and secede. And young Fall always remembered that dying autumn by his success in teaching a tame hawk to come to be fed when he played a call on the mended bugle.

Another outstanding memory of that harvest season was the coming of enormous flocks of blackbirds to settle like a sable blanket over the land and eat the ground bare of crops where they lighted. So illimitable were these pests over southwestern Minnesota that their flight would remain unbroken in passing a given point for an entire day.

The Falls were at the noon meal when the birds first appeared, and the sudden darkening of the room sent the family outdoors to see what tremendous storm was brewing. The State offered forty cents bounty for each hundred heads, and Murray earned enough to buy some clothes and stout hand-sewed soldier shoes for himself and his father, and a new dress for Alice and a shawl for his mother. But the crops were lost.

At the same time there was a visitation of sandhill cranes, so numerous and greedy that the farmers had difficulty in driving them from a field. And they withdrew before shotgun blasts only to return. The Pollackers killed large piles of blackbirds and cranes with poison. Murray used his shotgun until dried peas became a luxury.

In the spring of 'sixty-one the finding of a stranger, a white man, a few miles south of the Pollacker place, dead from a bullet through the head, caused more excitement than the fall of Fort Sumter. It was commonly believed Sioux hunters were guilty. Mad Martha surprized the Falls by maintaining that a white man, or men, committed the murder. The settlers were profoundly shocked by this tragedy, and Mrs. Fall was more nervous than ever when painted faces were pressed against the windows. But Martha insisted:

"No Injun did it. One shot through the head, a rifle bullet. Nothing taken. A Sioux would have used a shotgun and taken the knife and ring and watch. There are some men on or below the Iowa line who will kill any one trying to stop them from stealing horses.

"I've wandered quite a bit. I've heard things. No one minds Martha. Lots of stock is being stolen. More'll be stolen now we're going to have a war and both sides needs horses and beef-critters.

"I've seen new trails in the grass south of here. Never made by Injuns. Ed Pollacker told me five white men rode by their place in the night. The moon was bright. If they'd been honest men they'd stopped to eat and sleep."

WAR came; and the Blue Earth River rose twenty-six feet in two days. Much land was flooded, and several people were drowned. There was neither railroad, telegraph nor telephone, and the war news arrived as leisurely as ever. The flood was near at hand. One could see the drowned stock and gaze on the pallid faces of men and women. No matter how feverish were the daily changes in national affairs the Blue Earth country received the news but once a week. Fall and his son continued to defy weather and travel conditions in making Shelbyville on what little Alice called "War Day."

Once in seven days the village oracle monotonously read forth column after column. But there were no stirring rallies to sustain one's excitement in southwestern Minnesota. Men were enlisting in the northern centers, but there could be no beating of drums and unfurling of flags where only four families were to be found in twenty-five square miles.

Peter Clush in his old blue uniform and bell-topped hat came with a bayonet fastened to a willow pole. He remained a day before starting for Fort Snelling.

It was from Clush that Murray suddenly absorbed a great enthusiasm for going to war. He announced his desire to enlist. His mother shook her head and went about her work with pinched lips. His father laughed at him and said the war would be over in thirty days.

Lorin Cray came over and told Murray he was going to enlist in the fall if the war lasted that long. Murray promised to go along with him. But they were held at home, and the late spring of 'sixty-two found both working at home, but secretly determined to enlist after the crops were harvested or eaten by blackbirds.

Another happening now dimmed the war in importance for a day so far as the Falls and Pollackers were concerned. The girl Alice ran into the house after she was supposed to be on her way to school, and screamed that Pollacker had been savagely gored by his bull and that the creature was loose.

"Miss Martha rode by me," added the breathless child. "She was going to Shelbyville to get a doctor. She said I was to run home fast as I could and tell you."

Mrs. Fall stepped to the door and blew on Murray's bugle. By the time her husband and son arrived she had quieted the hysterical child and questioned her again. From her talk they gathered that Miss Martha happened to be riding by the Pollacker place directly after the bull broke from its pen, after goring Pollacker.

Fall, usually placid and even-tempered, for once showed temper.

"I've told Pollacker time and time again that that red —— would kill some of our women and children if he ever got out of the pen," he cried.

Then, meeting his wife's staring eyes, he quietly added:

"May the Lord watch over us and save us! Murray, take your rifle and look around. We must respect a neighbor's property. Don't take any chances of letting the bull catch you."

Murray snatched down the rifle and began loading it. He kept his face averted to conceal the pleasure showing in his eyes. Once the bull had chased him out of the picket enclosure, and Bert and Ed Pollacker had laughed uproariously at his frantic efforts to escape. He considered this opportunity to hunt the bull to be a God-given privilege. His father grew more anxious and pleaded:

"Don't you take any risks, Murray. Keep on the farm, close to the house and never away from cover. You mustn't get hurt. If the Pollacker boys will promptly capture the bull and promise to keep him penned up——"

"Who can say they'll keep him penned up?" broke in Mrs. Fall, her voice low and fierce, her dark eyes blazing as she glanced at the little girl. "They thought they had him penned up, but he got loose. It's only by chance that Alice did not meet him.

"Murray, you be careful. But you find that bull and kill him. Shoot straight. I'll not live in daily fear of that beast. You want to go to war, Murray. You find and kill that bull to prove you're worthy to go."

"Well, well!" muttered Mr. Fall. "Of course we have a right to defend ourselves. But we must remember the bull is property. We must respect the law——"

"Remember, Murray, the bull will gore you if it gets a chance. It'll kill Alice if it gets a chance. You never can enlist and go away and leave that beast waiting to kill your sister. Don't come home, Murray, till you've killed that bull. If it is back in the pen, kill it just the same."

"Come, come, wife!" expostulated Mr. Fall. "Trespassing and killing property ——"

"Alonzo!" she half-whispered, turning her set face toward him; and he began to understand why Little Crow, chief of the Kaposia band, had named her "Little Hornet."

In a low voice that suggested inward sobbing she continued:

"I've stood all I can. We can't keep the Indians from our windows, from walking around the house at nights, and from cluttering up the house. We can't stop the blackbirds and grasshoppers from eating what we work so hard to plant. But, by the Eternal, there's no reason why we should submit to the danger of a mad bull trying to kill us every time we step outside the house to get a pail of water."

She suddenly broke down and without another word hurried into the lean-to addition.

"Be careful, Murray. Your mother's unstrung and nervous."

"No wonder!" Murray hoarsely replied.

For the first time he realized something of the tragedy his mother had lived.

"Take one of the horses," advised his father.

But Murray shook his head. He knew a horse would multiply his danger. He felt choked as he ran from the house. From that moment his mother ceased to be an institution and became a human being, passionately devoted to her family and supremely unselfish.

But youth was driving him, and gradually he recovered his elation. His hunting had been limited to prairie chickens, the breasts of which his mother dried, and to one never-to-be-forgotten trip among the countless geese, ducks and brant on the marshy shores of the shallow Chanyaska Lake. Now he was after royal game.

His first incentive had been his recollection of his hurried flight from the pen and the derisive laughter of the Pollacker brothers. Now he was driven on by the sudden realization his mother had lived in fear ever since the bull became a potential killer.

He vaguely understood something of her dread each time she watched Alice start off for school. She must have had the fear in her heart when she walked about the farm, must have considered the possibility of encountering the beast in the tall grass, or of stumbling upon him in the thin growth fringing the tiny creek.

True, the animal had never escaped until this day; but when had there been a day when the little mother had not imagined it to be loose and with blood-red eyes glaring from some ambush? What he had first welcomed as an exciting adventure had become a solemn duty. He knew he could not go home until the bull was dead.

The Pollacker place was located on a tiny creek that flowed into the Blue Earth. There would be no cover until he reached the timber along the little stream. Before he was a dozen rods from home he knew he would be helpless unless his first bullet had mortal effect. Just beyond each slight grassy rise the animal might be waiting to charge him. In many places where the land was not under cultivation the grass stood as high as his head, and in such a jungle flight was impossible. And he was attributing to the bull all the cunning of a wild animal bent on making a kill.

He pressed forward steadily, watching the surface of the grass ahead when topping a rise. He halted when a swirl of wind localized its efforts and stirred a small spot of grass, just as an animal moving uneasily about in ambush might disturb it. But he never retreated.

He climbed with difficulty the first elm he came to but discovered nothing. Deciding that this precaution smacked of cowardice, he did not repeat it. He was risking his life on his marksmanship; but he had little faith in a bullet stopping the huge bulk unless he caught the animal unawares with a shot through the heart. He hastened on, his mother's command to slay the bull ringing in his ears.

Convinced that the adventure was very dangerous, he found it thrilling, and therefore pleasurable. His heart quickened as he drew farther from home, but from excitement rather than from fear. The bull was as dangerous and cunning as a tiger, but the hunter was on his mother's business; and that knowledge made everything all right.

He passed some distance to the east of the Pollacker place with a grassy ridge shutting it off from view. He entered the timber on the little creek south of the house and was quick to sense the friendly companionship of the scattered trees. He examined the growth as far as it extended west of the

house and took to the open grass lands, making south to a ring of trees roughly enclosing several acres of low-lying ground. If he did not find the bull there he would return and inspect the pen behind the Pollacker house.

Pollacker was a very powerful man. He could straighten a horseshoe with a twist of his big hands. On entering the bull-pen he invariably carried a pitchfork and a sled stake. And yet the bull had overcome him. Murray liked the Pollacker brothers, and he believed they would be infuriated if he killed the bull in the pen. Father and sons were keen for the dollar. They would no more kill a bull, except to save life, than they would wreck a mowing machine that had run over a man. But Murray was on his mother's business, and he knew he should persevere and kill or be killed.

HE STARTED down the slope of the lowland as rapidly as the grass would permit. He was startled to hear sharp, high-pitched yelping cries beyond the trees. Fearing that some one was ahead of him, he dashed through some bushes and halted behind an elm and for a few moments was incapable of action.

A blanket Indian was belaboring a blown horse as he rode north across the opening. When Murray saw him he had reached the center of the marshy tract, and the bull was charging him at right angles. Murray could not understand why the Indian did not turn from his northern course and ride away from the animal. The bull's back showed above the grass at times, and Murray threw up his rifle and fought a moment to steady his nerves.

Before he could fire three horsemen, white men, broke through the southern sector of trees, and there came a streak of flame and the bang of a rifle. The black powder smoke floated above the leader, and the man behind him fired a shot. The Indian was half over the side of his pony and yelping madly and incessantly plying a short whip. Murray made the amazing discovery that the strangers were not engaged in any Samaritan effort, but were deliberately shooting at the Indian.

The fugitive, over the left side of his pony to escape the rifle bullets, kept his head turned to the left to watch the advance of the bull; and all the while the right arm rose and fell and flogged the weary mount unceasingly. The white men discovered the Indian's new danger. They ceased firing and cheered exultingly. Murray came out of his stupefaction, remembered he was on his mother's business and fired.

The bull acknowledged the wound with a rumbling roar, but whirled half around and charged directly toward the three horsemen.

Oaths and wild laughter from the white men drowned out the Indian's yelping encouragement to the tired pony. Murray's gaze followed the new twist the drama had taken. The white men were no longer paying any heed to the Indian, but were riding apart and firing their revolvers at the charging bull.

Murray was scarcely conscious of the Indian's approach. Something fell at his feet as the pony passed within a few feet of him and he glanced aside in time to glimpse a wrist bound with a strip of skunk-skin. Then the bull-fight demanded his whole attention.

The enraged animal pivoted with unexpected quickness to charge first one and then another of the whooping horsemen. The men were joyously profane as if immensely enjoying the dangerous sport. Two would shout derisively each time the third man was dismounted, and each took a turn in being catapulted from the saddle. Their profanity was good-natured.

They no longer attempted to kill the bull but were eager to make a game of it. Each man attempted to maneuver his horse the closest to the bull. One of them, a black-bearded fellow with black hair hanging on his shoulders, was especially daring. With a loud shout he drove his horse between a companion's mount and the bull and reached over to twist the animal's tail.

The bull whirled like a cat, even while the arm was extended. The horse leaped frantically to escape the lunging horns, and the rider shot from the saddle. Murray yelled in horror as he beheld the lowered head about to gore the prostrate man. But there crashed a volley from heavy dragoon revolvers, and the bull sank to his knees, his head plowing the wet sod. To Murray it did not appear that the horns had touched the black-bearded man. His two companions leaped from their horses and dragged him aside and kneeled beside him.

Murray walked down to the strangers and was surprised to see that they had removed

the shirt from the fallen man and were examining a wound where a horn had ripped across the muscles of the back. One of them turned watery, half-closed eyes on Murray, and hoarsely demanded:

"Who the —— be you? What do you want?"

Murray gave his name and explained:

"I came out to kill the bull. I shot him as he was charging the Indian."

"—— you! You turned him against us with that —— bullet," growled the man.

"Easy, Mart. Strange country," said the second man as he began washing the wound with whisky poured from a bottle on a neckcloth. "We didn't have to play with that ugly ——. I knew the bullet was meant for the bull, the Injun or us, but there didn't seem any time to ask questions. How you feeling, Bisen?"

"All right, Archie. Wind sort of knocked out of me. Give me a drink, then plaster on the cloth."

And Bisen rose to a sitting posture and grinned broadly at the dead bull.

Archie covered the wound with the whisky-soaked cloth and encouraged the other:

"Didn't more'n rip through the hide. Almost tore into the old knife-scar."

Murray then noticed a red welt, extending almost at right angles with the raw wound and forming the letter T. Bisen glanced up at Murray, still grinning, remarked—

"So it was your lead that started the thing going?"

"The bull was about to smash into the Indian as you three came through the growth. I'm mighty sorry you're hurt."

"Good job if he had killed the —— Indian," growled Mart.

Bisen took another drink from the bottle and informed Murray:

"Red skunk stole some of our horses south of the line. We chased him and three other Injuns till they separated. We kept after him. Made him leave the horses. We'd got him if you hadn't mixed in."

"The bull would have got him," corrected Murray. "I didn't know he had stolen horses. You can report him to the lower agency. He lives within a mile of it. When he rode by me he tossed this to me."

And he held up the stuffed skin of a crow.

The three men eyed it curiously, and Bisen sharply asked:

"What do you mean? How does the skin of a crow tell us who the Injun is?"

"You've been chasing Little Crow, a chief of the Mdewakanton Sioux. The crowskin is his totem. I saw the skunkskin tied around his wrist. Wears a strip on both wrists to hide a bullet wound that smashed the bones in both arms. If you make a complaint at the agency the Indian agent will warn him to keep away from you. If he'd gotten away with any of your horses you could have demanded their value from the next summer money the Government sends."

Mart swore under his breath. Bisen laughed, got into his shirt and said:

"The trail is ended. We wanted his pelt, but we won't gun any farther for Little Crow. At least, not up here. Boys, we might as well be jogging back."

Murray saw a dark stain seeping through the woolen shirt, and he urged:

"Don't travel. It'll make your hurt worse. Come home with me. My folks will be glad to put you up. Your back will soon mend. I take it you're Iowa settlers."

"Yes; Iowy settlers," said Mart. "Maybe you'd best rest for a few days, Bisen."

"You'll be more than welcome," Murray eagerly assured him. "I feel sort of to blame for what's happened."

"Get on to your nag and go with him, Bisen," added Archie. "You'll lose too much blood or git poison in the wound if you ride to the line."

"All right," decided Bisen. "Sha'n't need that."

And he handed a rifle to Mart. Then, taking his blanket roll, he climbed into the saddle and told Murray—

"If your folks will take me in for a day or two I'll be much obliged."

"They'll be glad to. Any of the neighbors would. The Pollacker place is a mile nearer, but the old man is mighty bad off. Bull gored him before getting loose. We'll soon be home."

With a nod Bisen parted from his companions, who rode south. Murray walked beside the horse, eager to talk. He told how his mother sent him out to kill the bull, and gloomily concluded with—

"But I didn't kill him after all."

"You started it all right," chuckled Bisen.

Murray next asked—

"What do you hear about the war?"

Bisen promptly declared that the Federal armies were being whipped as fast as they could take the field; nor did he appear to be downcast while imparting the news. Murray warmly argued against the assertion and insisted that the South would be whipped. Bisen did not care to enter into any dispute and contented himself with saying:

"War's raising hob with all of us. Pretty soon paper money won't be worth anything."

"Paper money is as strong as the Union," insisted Murray. "Father says gold is like a fox, and hides at the least sign of trouble. Times are getting a bit easier in some parts of this State now the enlisted men are sending their money back home. Some trouble-maker has been telling the Sioux at the upper and lower agencies that they won't get their money this year. But Uncle Sam always pays. Has to be paid in gold, you know."

"Injuns will be mad if they don't get it," mused Bisen. "Must be quite a heap of money. A big chunk of money—and all in gold. Injuns must be paid in gold, but the rest of us must worry along with paper!"

"That was in the treaty of 'fifty-one. They don't understand paper money."

"When's the next batch to be paid?"

"Early this next month. Lorin Cray and I are going to enlist after the crops are harvested."

Bisen glanced down at him curiously and suggested—

"You may have plenty of fighting right here at home if the Injuns don't get that gold."

"No chance of that. Quite a few are turning farmers. Government builds and furnishes a house and stocks a farm for every one who throws aside his blanket, cuts his hair and dresses and lives like white folks."

"I've heard tell that the Sioux don't take kindly to the notion of making a red man into a white one; that they call an Injun farmer, 'Cut-Hair' and 'Breeches.'"

"That's true," Murray gravely admitted. "It'll take time. But the Minnesota River already is dotted with Indian farms."

"And a chief comes down below the line and steals horses," Bisen dryly reminded him. "They'll take government gold and rations, but they'll always be Sioux. And I don't believe many whites would work themselves into a sweat if they were paid gold every year and had pork and flour handed out each week. I know I'd be mighty lazy if any one would pay for my living."

Murray remembered his father's description of Indian bucks loafing and smoking and gossiping in fence corners while their women did the work, so he said nothing.

THE Falls were outside the house, watching for Murray's return. Mrs. Fall wept and threw her arms around her son's neck. His father coughed and timidly inquired about the bull. Murray briefly explained, and then the welcome of Bisen was most cordial. Inside the house Murray had to repeat his story in detail. Bisen patched it out with a humorous recital of Little Crow's raid. Mrs. Fall believed her son would have been killed if it had not been for the arrival of the three white men. She felt deeply indebted to Bisen. Her husband was always pleased to have a new pair of ears to talk to. He was much interested in the aboriginal people of the State and was quick to say the Sioux were not being fairly treated.

He described the wrongs suffered by the red men while Bisen's wound was being cleansed and dressed with linen. The family, the neighbors and the weekly gathering at the Shelbyville postoffice had heard the recital many times, and were inclined to be bored by it. Bisen was an ideal audience. He listened attentively and often nodded an endorsement.

Fall was very earnest, however, in insisting the traders were at fault, and not the settlers. He lamented that the traders should secure so much of the annuity money and stated that they had secured more than two hundred thousand dollars of the first allotment.

"They came with their books and claimed the Sioux owed them huge sums for goods advanced on credit, for horses stolen more than fifteen years ago," he summed up. "I don't believe all the claims were honest ones. The Indians had no account books. Some were long dead against whom accounts stood. They had no one to defend them. The traders got what they demanded."

"Many of the traders are honest men," Mrs. Fall gently reminded him.

"Oh, some are. May be quite a lot. More likely most of them let their honesty stop with whites. And some of them smuggle in whisky."

"Too bad!" murmured Bisen. "Probably the Injuns have to pay in gold."

"Gold or ponies or furs. Traders make from a hundred to five hundred per cent. profit on legitimate trade. From what I've heard at Shelbyville and from Papa Baptiste the whisky smugglers don't bother with any other trade. Profit enough in whisky alone. No need to stock a store, hire clerks and keep books when a cartload of whisky can be sold in a single night, with the Indians giving all they have to get it. No credit given in that game."

"That would seem that a legitimate trader would be cutting his own throat to handle whisky," said Bisen.

"And that's why I don't believe the traders handle that kind of trade," spoke up Mrs. Fall. "But while most of the mixed bloods and some of the full bloods speak and read English and know when they're being robbed, no one seems to be listening when they make a complaint."

"Injuns have just one way of showing they don't like anything," Bisen gravely told her.

Then to her husband—

"And if I was you, Neighbor Fall, I'd want to have my family back on the Mississippi when the next batch of government money fails to show up."

Fall smiled and assured Bisen:

"If they get out of bounds it'll be the traders they'll go after. Hardly a settler from St. Peter through the Big Woods and along the reservation who didn't open up his vegetable cellar this spring to feed the hungry Sioux. The Sioux don't forget. They aren't fools."

Bisen's eyes narrowed and his voice grated as he warned the other:

"See here, Fall; I've watched the Sioux act up in Dakota. The Minnesota bands will act up about the same if they ever get started wrong. I'd be mighty fussy about two things if I was homesteading out here and any Injun trouble came; I wouldn't have any women folks here, and I'd be sure to save one bullet for myself if I was cornered."

Fall did not relish this statement, but being a courteous host he made no reply. Murray, however, patted the crowskin pinned to his shirt and proudly said—

"No Sioux will hurt me, even if they should break out."

"Maybe not, young son; but there's four of you in this house and only one crowskin," Bisen grimly reminded him. "And never get caught by hostiles to prove your faith. Down in Iowa they say the Indians up here are divided against each other. An enemy of Little Crow wouldn't have any mercy on you. And always remember the war hasn't made the Indians feel any too good toward white folks."

"They have funny notions about the war," Murray said with a laugh. "A Shelbyville carpenter, who's worked at both agencies, says they're mighty keen to get the war news. He says they're always asking the missionaries if the South hasn't burned all the Northern cities and if the Great Father hasn't been killed and scalped. One Sioux, who reads and writes English as well as the average white, asked this carpenter if it wasn't true that all white and red men in Minnesota will be made slaves very soon."

"When you hear talk like that, Murray, use your reason," sharply advised Fall. "They may ask some foolish questions, but it only shows they're afraid. Nearly all the mixed bloods at the agencies are enlisting. That shows they're patriotic."

Bisen dryly remarked:

"A Dakota Sioux would say the North's so hard pressed and is being licked so fast it even has to send 'way up here to enlist breeds. And an Indian never likes a loser."

Mrs. Fall observed her small daughter's close attention, and reminded:

"Bad for little pitchers. We know there isn't the slightest danger of any uprising. But I do wish they could stop the selling of liquor to the Indians."

"Of course there can't be any trouble here," heartily agreed Bisen. "But the whisky smugglers must clean up lots of money—and all in gold."

"It's monstrous!" cried Mrs. Fall.

DIRECTLY after supper Bisen decided to go to bed. Because of his wound he was given Murray's bed in the loft, with Murray sleeping on some buffalo robes on the floor. Bisen opened his blanket roll and placed two revolvers on the bed. Observing Murray's keen interest he warned him that both guns

were loaded. They were the first Remington forty-four percussion guns the young man had seen. They were a trifle heavier than the Colt's navy and had a solid frame.

Bisen remarked:

"That one-piece frame comes in handy if you want to fetch a man a crack over the head. It's not safe to try that game with a two-piece frame. There's a solid frame Colt fifty-five with a side hammer, but I don't like it as well as I do these."

"I'd like to have one," murmured Murray, his eyes glistening.

"You haven't any call for hand guns. What you want is one of the new Spencer rifles. I'm going to trade my rifle for a Spencer when I get back home."

"I never saw one, but I love firearms. It'll be years before I can afford a new rifle of any kind."

"Maybe you can afford one sooner'n you think," encouraged Bisen. "The new Spencer shoots a big cartridge—.56-52. Stops anything it hits. Not a long-range cartridge, but death to what it hits. You'd have done for that bull if you'd been shooting a Spencer. Magazine holds seven cartridges and is in the stock. Loads through a trap in the butt. Pull out a long tube and fill it and shove it back. With a load in the chamber you can fire eight bullets mighty fast."

"It'll be one thing to dream about," said Murray. "But these are mighty handsome guns."

And he raised and lowered one to get the hang of it.

Frowning slightly, Bisen warned:

"Better not fool with them. You've no call for hand guns."

In the morning Mrs. Fall dressed Bisen's back and said it was beginning to heal. She tried to have him keep quiet; but the man was not made for indoors, and as soon as he had eaten his breakfast he went to look after his horse. Alice was his guide and companion as Fall and his son had their work to do.

After the midday meal Bisen announced his intention of riding down to the Pollacker place and explaining about the bull. Mrs. Fall consented for Alice to ride behind him.

Bert Pollacker came out to meet them. Bisen made himself known and told of the bull's death and of his own wound. Bert asked him inside and suggested that Alice remain outside with the horse. At the door he whispered:

"Father's in a bad way. Miss Martha, one of our neighbors, went for a doctor but hasn't brought one yet. I'm afraid all the doctors in Minnesota can't do any good. If he comes to his senses don't say anything about the bull being dead. He thought a heap of the —— brute. I'm glad the ——'s dead. I'd like to have you see father if you know anything about bad hurts."

"I've had some experience," admitted Bisen.

They found Pollacker muttering in delirium and Ed holding him on the bed. After examining the horrible wound in the abdomen Bisen returned to the built-on kitchen, followed by Bert, and said:

"At the longest he can't last twenty-four hours. Not half of that if he keeps rolling about. Ripped to pieces inside."

"We've told him time and time again never to enter that pen when he'd been drinking," lamented Bert.

"Too bad. You two will carry on the farm?"

"Have to; but I hate farming. We'll try to get a hired hand to help out. We've put in big crops and if the drought and cutworm and grasshoppers and blackbirds keep away we'll make a fine harvest. Have a drink."

As he spoke he opened a door leading into a shed, and Bisen's eyes widened for a second as he beheld several jugs and four barrels of what he took to be whisky.

"Some time before you'll get out of liquor," he remarked.

"We fetch in enough at one haul to last quite a while. Ed's like father; drinks twice as much as I do, and four times more'n he ought to. Help yourself."

Bisen deftly swung a jug over his arm, then lowered it, replaced the stopper and decided:

"Reckon I won't. Might heat my blood and be bad for my raw back. Thanks to you just the same."

"If Miss Martha only would come with a doctor——"

"No doctor can help your father, man. He's dying now. I'm sorry. Wish I could do something. I'll be going."

Bisen was absent-minded on the ride to the Fall home and did not heed his small companion's questions until she pounded

her fist against the wounded back. He said little about his visit until evening when the little girl was asleep in the curtained-off corner. Then he briefly repeated what Bert Pollacker had said about the dying man having been under the influence of liquor when he entered the bull pen.

"It's a judgment upon him!" softly exclaimed Mrs. Fall.

"Drink's a bad thing," agreed Bisen.

"I mean even worse than that," she amended.

Her husband coughed and remonstrated—

"Now, mother; now, mother."

"I've said it before trouble came to them, and I'll say it now they've fetched this last trouble down on their heads. Drinking is bad enough; but selling to the Indians——"

"Hush!" warned her husband. "You don't know that. You mustn't say that."

"I'll not hush, Alonzo Fall," she warmly retorted. "No three men can drink a four-yoke load of whisky in the short time it takes that amount to disappear from the Pollacker place. And Bert and Ed are gone from home for days at a time with their light wagon. No one sees them start, but more'n once they've been seen coming back—from the north—with an empty wagon. The three of them always have gold. Rest of us see mighty little paper money. They have gold, and the Sioux are paid in gold. Don't tell me they don't haul liquor to the reservation on those trips——"

"Good ——, woman! You'll ruin us all!" cried Fall.

The woman's flushed face grew pale, and she turned her eyes in appeal to Bisen. He quietly reassured her:

"You know I will never repeat anything you say. I wouldn't be surprized if they have been carrying on a very lively whisky trade with the Injuns. I believed as much when I saw the stock in their shed. You can say anything you want to before me and feel perfectly safe."

The three of them were relieved by his words, but the topic was avoided for the rest of the evening.

On the next day Bisen saddled his horse directly after dinner and announced that he was well enough to ride home. They were urging him to remain for at least one more day when Bert Pollacker, bareheaded, galloped up to announce that his father was dead. Miss Martha had brought a doctor during the night, but there was nothing to be done. Under cover of the slight confusion caused by this new neighborly duty thrust upon the Falls Bisen rode away.

Two days later the sheriff of Blue Earth County and two deputies rode out of the tall grass and reined in before the Fall door. Without dismounting the sheriff asked—

"Have you a stranger stopping here, Alonzo?"

"He's back in Iowa by this time. Name of Bisen. Mighty likely sort of a man. He was hurt by Pollacker's bull and rested up here for a couple days. He and some of his neighbors chased Little Crow up here. Said the chief and some of his men stole horses below the line."

"Little Crow admits trying to steal the horses, but it happens that Bisen and his friends stole them first. Horse thieves. They hang out on one of the heads of the Des Moines just below the line. When Iowa gets too hot for them they ride into Minnesota. Now that I'm after them they'll be making faces at me from across the line. Come along, boys. It's a wild-goose chase, but we'll ride farther."

Amazement and consternation filled the farmhouse after the officers rode away. Murray felt guilty on discovering that the sheriff's accusation was thrilling him as had the adventure with the bull. For two weeks the family did not tire of discussing horse-thieves, and Bisen in particular. As a news item it overshadowed Pollacker's death. What astounded father and son, although the latter was quick to agree, was Mrs. Fall's insistence that Bisen was a likable man, even if he be a thief. She added she would not believe the charge until it was proved.

When the Falls next visited Shelbyville to learn the latest war news the postmaster suspended his reading about a new bill to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia and in the territories to question father and son about their late guest.

It was well toward morning when the journey home was finished. Murray was first at the door and tripped over something that hurt his shins. His mother heard him stumble and unfastened and opened the door, and held above her head what perhaps was the first kerosene lamp west of the Blue Earth River.

Murray gave a cry of joy, and the next

moment was hugging a new Spencer rifle in his arms, while his father curiously examined an extra magazine tube, a foot long. It was Mrs. Fall who discovered two boxes at one side of the door.

The smaller box contained two hundred big rim-fire cartridges. In the other was a big doll, daintily dressed, such a doll as would be difficult to find in all of Minnesota.

Still hugging the rifle after the door was closed and barred, Murray excitedly exclaimed:

"Say what they want to about Bisen, but he's been good to me and Alice. He *is* a likable man, mother. Think of his riding 'way up here to leave this gun and running the risk of being chased and shot! And that doll! He had to risk a trip to some city to get that."

CHAPTER II

FALL'S HIRED MAN

IT WAS Ed Pollacker who dubbed Cray's hired man "Shanty Mose." The coming of Mose to the Blue Earth country was a trifling incident, but in a thinly settled land incidents attract more attention than some senators do in Washington. Mose was short and stocky of figure with iron-gray side whiskers, giving his face an appearance of squareness. Ed. Pollacker would ride several miles out of his way to listen to Mose's boasting, but had he not been a resourceful and willing worker when denied an audience Cray would not have tolerated him.

He was a derelict from the north woods. He was industrious when working by himself. In all matters not pertaining to his past he was honest. He had drifted widely since quitting the logging camps, perhaps because of an itch to travel or because he had talked himself out of each job.

He was a delight to the Pollacker boys, especially to Ed, and brightened more than one gloomy hour for them after their father's death. He was permitted the use of a horse on Sundays and rode much. Once he called on Peter Clush only to find nailed to the shanty-door a sign that announced—

GONE TO WAR.

On week days he often walked over to the Fall and Pollacker farms in the evening. The Pollacker boys were immensely amused to observe Mr. Fall accepting Mose and his yarns seriously at first and bothering his head trying to reconcile contradictory statements. Murray liked to make notes of dates and observe how frequently Mose was in several widely separated places on the same day. Mrs. Fall flatly denounced him as an "old nuisance."

Late one week day he rode over to the Fall place and entered with an air of importance. The family wondered how he happened to have the use of a horse in midweek. He came to the object of his visit at once.

"Mr. Fall, sir," he importantly began, standing very erect and brushing his whiskers forward, "I am requested by my employer to relay a message to you from the postmaster at Shelbyville. I am requested to tell you that you are expected to pay forthwith the sum of one dollar, the same being the State war tax levied against you last year according to the law. You can see that I am acting for the Federal Government in bringing this message. Whew! Well, that duty is done. Now I can be neighborly."

And he relaxed and slumped into a barrel-chair and fanned his broad face and beamed on Mrs. Fall, who stared belligerently.

Fall sighed and muttered:

"Knew it must be bad news of some sort. But I'm glad you didn't bring bad news about the Crays. I suspect the Government doesn't know how scarce money is in Blue Earth County."

"Sinews of war to keep our nation going," bruskly reminded Mose.

"Just how much are you giving toward keeping the nation going?" asked Mrs. Fall pleasantly, yet with an ominous glitter in her eye.

It was useless to attack the man. He smiled genially and admiringly cried:

"There you are! Dead center. Finger on the weak spot first thing. Ain't any one on earth that reads my true character like Mrs. Fall does. If our lawmakers were half as keen as she we'd never have no war nor nothing. And yet, friends, I am not a weak man. I can truthfully say that if I hadn't come to this country I might have been in Washington. And if I'd gone to Washington there'd be mighty few taxes, I'll warrant you. Yes, ma'am.

"I was born in 1812, and from a young man up I've spent my life out here. Oh,

they've heard of Mose in Washington. I've had chances to go there. But I've held off. Selfish, maybe; but I like up here. I was with the first lumber crew to visit the St. Croix Falls. I had charge of the first raft of logs to go down the St. Croix. That was in 'forty-three. Before that we'd sent down nothing but lumber rafts. It took four St. Croix rafts to make one Mississippi raft, ma'am.

"I helped put up the first mill—really bossed the job. Four frame-saws and one muley. A 'muley,' ma'am, as you know, is a saw without any frame. It's true that I got only sixteen dollars a month at first, but they soon see the kind of a man I was, and my pay jumped ahead of t'others.

"In 'forty-six, ma'am, I took a whang-dinger of a lumber raft down and fetched back the *Amulet*, stern-wheeler and open like a row-boat. There was only a boom at Stillwater then.

"It was in May, 'fifty-seven, ma'am, that I won the prize for taking the first steamboat through to Galena in the spring. Worth a thousand dollars when you counted in the season's free wharfage, ma'am."

As he paused to catch his breath Mrs. Fall made a silent appeal to Murray. It was the visitor's habit to direct his reminiscences to her, thereby often holding her an impatient prisoner. Smothering a grin, Murray cut in with—

"You must have seen lots of Indians in those early days, Mose."

"Indians!" exclaimed Mose. "Why, I got so I knew the red critters better'n they knew themselves. First lumber camp was put up by Joe R. Brown at Taylors' Falls flat in the winter of 'thirty-six. But the first regular outfit was brought in by John Joyce in the next year. Eleven men and six oxen. Brought from St. Louis in a mackinaw boat. Built the camp at the mouth of the Kanabac. Indians hung around thicker'n spatter in both places. The Sioux borrowed our wash boiler so often to mix war paint in that we couldn't use it. Then the Winnebagoes got ugly and we had to quit. I'd have stayed and rotted first; but Joyce was after logs, not fighting."

Mr. Fall emerged from a troubled bit of meditation and announced: "Your talk has given me an idea, Mose, how to pay that tax. Murray, yoke up the oxen first thing in the morning. You'll stop to supper, Mose?"

"I'd love to; but my errand's done, and Mr. Cray will be expecting me back. He's keen to get my advice on a new corncrib."

Mrs. Fall did not reappear until Mose had departed; and then to complain—

"That man makes me nervous enough to fly."

"Neighbors are too scarce for you to feel that way," said her husband. "He talks a lot, but I'm sure he's honest."

"Last time he talked he said he was bossing a lead mine in Galena in 'forty-three," chuckled Murray.

"An active man may get mixed in his dates and still be honest. Anyway his talk gave me an idea how to pay that tax."

Those living apart from pioneer conditions may think it absurd that the matter of one dollar should cause the Falls any embarrassment. Money, however, was very scarce along the border. In 'fifty-seven there had been practically no money in all Minnesota. Articles that were sold for fifteen dollars in trade were gladly sold for five dollars in cash.

Now in 'sixty-two the homesteaders were working on their farms as long as daylight lasted. They grew crops and traded any surplus. Until the blackbird pest permitted Murray to buy shoes with bounty money he had gone barefooted from the first grass to the first snow. When at home his father had often gone barefooted to save shoe-leather. Since coming to Minnesota, except on one occasion, Murray had never seen his mother wear anything more expensive than drill and denim. The family had fought through the first winter on potatoes and corn and had not taken in a dollar in money. Now that they were raising wheat and fattening hogs their living was much improved; but they saw no money. Their land was of great promise. A railroad was surely coming. If they could hold their acres then the farm some time would have a decided money value.

So it happened that it was a problem to to find a dollar tax money offhand without borrowing it. The Pollacker boys had hard money and both could be open-handed. But the thought of passing a responsibility to another through the medium of a loan never was entertained by any of the Falls.

Early in the morning father and son

departed with two yoke of oxen and a large package of cooked food. Mr. Fall complained to his yoke of oxen:

"I'd supposed the Government had more important business than to be tracking me down in this out-of-the-way place. I've planned all along to pay that tax, but I'd hoped for a little more time. Anybody would think money grew on wild grass out here. I only hope the whisky smugglers will pay up."

Fall had decided to cut and sell a sawlog. He could have done it the year before had he felt he could spare the time. Ably aided by Murray and the oxen, he worked all day and far into the night.

When the work was done they were in Shelbyville. They spread their blankets beside the big log and slept until sunrise brought life to the sawmill. Then the log was sold for one dollar, and Fall discharged his obligation to a Government fighting for its life.

Clear of debt, the two ate a cold breakfast, baited the oxen and walked about town. Observing a small group of men in front of the blacksmith shop, they wandered that way.

"They're wrestling!" joyfully cried Murray, and he quickened his step.

"You keep your shirt on and keep out of it," warned his father. "One of the Prescott boys broke his arm at that foolishness last harvest, and his father had to hire an extra hand. But there's no harm in looking on."

Murray had deduced wrestling from the ring formed by the men. As he and his father joined the circle they beheld a stranger was the center of attention. He was inside the ring. His face was long and ill-shaped as if it had been twisted. A wisp of beard stuck out from his chin. His expression was melancholy, and the thin, angular figure did not suggest the wrestler. As the Falls pricked their ears to learn the cause of the gathering the stranger defiantly demanded:

"Well, what about them? They're mine. Any law against my wearing them?"

"Don't you go and git huffy," advised the blacksmith, folding his arms across his apron. "You're a stranger. If we want to know where you got such new-fangled clothes you want to be civil of tongue. For all we know you may be one of them Border Ruffians from down Missouri way. These are queer times, and men's tempers are uncertain."

The Falls observed that the stranger's boots were of French calf, somewhat the worse for wear, but originally costing much money. The clothes, also showing signs of wear, suggested days of prosperity. The collar and cuffs of the coat were of velvet. The trousers were of black cassimere. A heavy gold watch-chain was looped across the red flannel shirt. The tie was of black silk, in a square knot and with flowing ends. The hat, wide of brim and once white, completed what on a more prepossessing figure would have been a picturesque appearance. Murray could not resist paying homage to the stranger's style of dress even if the figure and features impressed him as being insignificant.

Without looking at the smith the man told him in a slightly nasal tone—

"If your tempers are so uncertain and hot why don't you go to war and get blooded?"

"Hi, mister! None of that talk!" excitedly cried one of the bystanders.

The smith drew a deep breath and growled—

"By ——! He thinks he can face down the citizens of Shelbyville!"

The man stared over the heads of those before him and in a colorless voice replied:

"You've made fun of my boots and clothes. Watch-chain seems to be all right as you ain't mentioned it. Most of you don't like my hat. It cost more'n all the hats in sight and was paid for in honest money. I ain't asked you high-strung critters for any favors. I've simply let on that I'd like a job. I'm looking for work. My asking for work seems to make more excitement then a reb gunboat would in churning up to St. Paul."

"You've refused to tell who and what you are," accused the smith.

"The man who'll consider giving me work will learn all about me. As no one here seems to need any help, having lots of time to gad about and pry into other folks' business, I'll be moving on."

"Not so fast!" warned the blacksmith, realizing the investigation was dwindling to an anticlimax.

And he stepped into the circle and sought to detain the stranger by clamping a hand down on a sloping shoulder.

Murray thought he detected a suggestion

of motion in one elbow, and the hooking forward of one foot. He was amazed to behold the blacksmith on his hands and knees, like one examining the ground for something lost.

The stranger advanced to break through the circle. The men blocking his way met his gaze for a moment, then drew aside. The stranger, not appearing to have seen them, walked over to where the Fall oxen were feeding.

The smith muttered an explanation about "stubbing" his toe and went back to his shop. The others quickly dispersed. The Falls followed the stranger. On coming up to him Murray diffidently remarked—

"That was a neat trick, mister."

The man stared at him, and the stranger gloomily answered:

"It would be a neater trick if I could get some work. Wrestling tricks don't fill a man's stomach."

Murray opened the remnants of the cooked food, produced a huge piece of gingerbread and invited:

"Have a quarter section. Seems to be about all that's left."

Smiling in a wry fashion, the man accepted the cake and hungrily devoured it. Then he informed Murray:

"I come down here planning to homestead."

"I don't see how you can take up land unless you have some money," discouraged Mr. Fall. "Plenty of land to be had, but mighty little money. The boy and me and these oxen worked most of two days to cut and haul a saw-log here so I could pay last year's State war tax of one dollar."

"I'd planned on hiring out for a season and getting my bearings before settling down."

"I've got a place west of the river, but I can't afford to hire a hand."

Murray suggested:

"The Pollacker boys might want a man, now their father's dead. The Crays have hired Shanty Mose, or you might get in there."

The man wiped the crumbs from his lips and volunteered the information:

"My name is Abner Page. Come west to join the Jayhawkers and help give the Border Ruffians ——. After watching how they did things in Kansas and Missouri for a spell I decided I couldn't tell which side was which. Heard of this country up here and come to look it over. That was in 'fifty-six."

"Six years ago," mused Fall. "You didn't want to take up land then."

"Went in for piloting rafts and steamboats on the St. Croix and Mississippi. Four hundred dollars a month tempted me."

As he paused the Falls exchanged startled glances. It was more money than they had seen since coming to Minnesota. Page resumed:

"Those were good old days. Wore clothes like these, only new ones, all the time. Always put on kid gloves when ladies visited the pilot house. I know the eight hundred miles from Stillwater to St. Louis as well as you know the way back to your farm."

"And while earning four hundred dollars a *month* you couldn't save anything!" exclaimed Fall. "We all need help out here; lots of it. But even if I could afford to hire a hand I wouldn't take a chance on a man who had wasted a fortune on geegaws and clothes. If he'd waste for himself, he'd waste for me."

In the same empty voice Page defended himself.

"But my money never went that way. I came from New Hampshire to help bleeding Kansas, and didn't like the way both sides was bleeding each other. But I'd come out to help, and to square my conscience I sent quite a bit of money East to buy 'moral' rifles to be sent to Kansas."

"I could use a man but I couldn't pay him," sadly repeated Fall. "It's possible the Pollacker boys would hire you."

"They could pay wages?"

"Easily."

Page fumbled with his wisp of a whisker and thoughtfully decided:

"A man who'll work like you did to pay the State war tax will always keep his word. I want land."

"But in a short time on the river at high wages—" began Murray.

"The hifalutin' days are ended," Page broke in. "I knew what was coming when Cap'n C. G. Bradley, of the *Minnie Wills*, towed a raft to Clinton, Iowa, without using poles, plugs, lock-downs, oars or auger-holes. I could see what the *Minnie Wills* was writing on the wall. No time lost in getting a raft ready; no lumber wasted by auger-holes and the like. Even then I knew that land was the one thing that couldn't change except to grow more valuable.

"But I hated to break away without taking another whack at river profits. I hadn't sent all my money East to buy 'Beecher rifles'. So I went into partnership with a man who owned a small, smart, stern-wheeler. We figured to make a fortune doing as Cap'n Bradley'd done. Then my partner's wife ran away with a handsomer feller. Partner took to drink and changed the name of his boat to the *Alone;* meaning he was left alone in the world.

"I told him it spelled bad luck, but he would do it. Then he got drunk at the wheel one day in a heavy storm, and before I could relieve him we was piled up on the west shore of Lake Pepin; and from Lake City to Read's Landing the shore was white with broken lumber we'd had in tow. That cleaned me out. Yes, sir. I'd like to work for you a while, or for your neighbors."

"I couldn't pay wages," Fall reminded him.

"I'm heading to that. Your neighbors may want a man. May not. Suppose I go home with you and find out? If they can't use me, suppose I work for you this season for my keep and take a little time to look around? Even if I had the money I'd have to look around before locating. I'd be costing you my keep, but I'm a humdinger to work even if I do say it."

Fall weighed the offer carefully and for a minute studied the solemn, twisted features. Finally he decided:

"We'll try it, Page. I usually talk things over with my woman, but I know she'd agree. Maybe you can go to work for the Pollackers at once. If you don't suit us, or we don't suit you, you won't be any worse off than you are now. If you stay with us I'll advise you best I can, and we can do some land-looking on Sundays."

"And you're to show me that wrestling trick," added Murray.

Page smiled slowly and corrected:

"Trick to stop folks wrestling when you ain't in the notion to come to bear-hugs. It's simple. Just grab hold of me."

Murray made the endeavor. When he picked himself up from the ground Page said:

"That's all there is to it. Elbow and heel working in opposite directions. Now I'll get my bundle and be right back."

"You can look for us at the postoffice if we ain't here with the oxen. I'll tell the postmaster to put your mail with mine."

"Like my old partner I'm alone. You'll find me here."

Thus was a new member added to the Fall household. Murray was captivated by the man's colorful stories of rafting and steamboating. Fall also enjoyed the evening recitals.

For some reason Mrs. Fall did not like Page. Inside of twenty-four hours after his arrival she was warning her husband:

"The man's deceitful. You'll find something's wrong with him."

"Now, mother! No hasty judgments," Fall impatiently told her. "He worked hard to-day. He has a way with oxen you'd never suspect. When he's alone he puts in the licks just as hard as if I was working with him."

"He talks too much," she insisted. "He doesn't brag like Shanty Mose, but he manages to be the central figure in every story. Some of his stuff must be lies. I never trust a person who always tells big stories and who never gets the worst of it."

"I guess river men usually tell big stories, just like sailors."

"He won't stick to anything long. Why didn't he get work where he was acquainted?" she pursued.

"Maybe he was too proud to take twenty dollars a month where he'd been earning such high wages."

"Then he's silly in his pride," she scoffed.

"Alonzo, I sha'n't say anything more about him. But you remember my words; the man is playing a part. I've even wondered if he come down here to hide from somebody, or something."

"And wearing clothes that make him stand out like a sore thumb!"

"If so, it's because he never wore the like before," she stoutly replied. "He's too glib of tongue. I'll be glad to have Martha judge him. However, if he keeps on helping you and Murray I won't say another word."

"You liked Bisen; and see what the sheriff said about him," he reminded her.

"I liked him. He's human. The sheriff only knows what Little Crow told him. The missionaries say the Indian is an awful liar. He wanted to shoulder his stealings on to Bisen. Bisen wasn't here to speak for himself. But he did come 'way up here

and leave a doll for Alice and a gun for Murray. But even if he is what the sheriff says he is, he wasn't deceitful. He didn't tell any long rigmaroles about his life."

"Well, well; have done," mumbled Fall. "I'll go over and see if the Pollacker boys will hire him."

He did not make the trip, however. Early next morning Bert Pollacker stopped on his way to Shelbyville and announced he and Ed had hired a Wisconsin man.

"If your man had come along a bit earlier we'd been glad to hire him. We'll give him a try if the new man doesn't suit," he added.

AS THE days passed Fall grew more pleased with the way Page took hold of the work. Even if he did tell long stories and usually permitted himself to figure in the leading rôle there could be no gainsaying his industry. Giving his work he finished it expeditiously and thoroughly. He worked just as faithfully when alone. He proved to be ingenious in making up little devices and arrangements for lightening Mrs. Fall's work. And scarcely a day that he did not hunt up Fall and say:

"That's finished. What next?"

When Sunday came Fall planned to keep his word and take Page land-looking, but was held at home by an influx of visitors. Not only did the Crays come over, bringing Shanty Mose, but Miss Martha rode up. At the first opportunity Mrs. Fall asked her opinion of Page and was somewhat disgruntled to be told:

"I like him. He would be very kind to little children."

In her soft, colorless voice she talked with the two hired hands, questioning them about the Winnebago Indians. The two vied with each other in giving her information she undoubtedly already knew. Once when they got to arguing as to the cause of the ancient enmity between the Sioux and the Chippewa she set them right, saying:

"Both are wrong. They've fought all these years over the wild-rice marshes. The Chippewas always would come down to gather the rice even when they knew it meant a fight. The Sioux would always go far north after rice even when they had plenty at home."

After she left them to help Mrs. Fall with the dinner the two men were quickly at odds again. Mose looked on Page as an intruder and as a rival in story-telling. Page angered him by assuming to correct recitals of logging-camp life. Mose hotly told him at last—

"All you know about logging is what you saw from a pilot-house."

"But you were mixed up about the race from Galena to St. Paul in the spring of 'fifty-seven," countered Page. "I was at Lake Pepin before the three-foot ice went out, and I know there was twenty boats waiting in Bogus Bay. It was the *Arcola* that was cut in two by the ice shutting in, and not the *Nelson*. The wheels of the *Nelson* was busted and the *Pioneer* sank. The *Falls of St. Anthony* was out of water on the niggerheads. The *War Eagle* at the head of the lake locked the other boats in."

This circumstantial data confused Mose for a bit. He plucked at his side whiskers, eyed Page wrathfully and sought to retreat by saying:

"I don't pretend to carry names of boats in my head. I'm a logger. I'm a camp-man. We fellows at Taylor's Fall and above never had as high an opinion of river pilots as some folks seem to have.

"Any one can stand at a wheel and steer a boat. But it's a might different matter to take out a raft as we did in the old days for the St. Croix Lumber Company. Had to tie blankets on poles and stand the shanty boards on end to catch the wind and sneak through lakes St. Croix and Pepin before a storm piled us up. There wasn't any finnified pilots then; but the logs and lumber come out just the same.

Martha entered, her moccasined feet making no sound, gazed thoughtfully at the two men and told them:

"You both tell much truth. You both tell things not true. Why don't you talk about pretty things? The rice plants are now showing their blossoms of pale yellow green, and the beds are so many low green islands in the lakes. Why not talk about them? Or tell of the clouds of rice-birds and red-winged blackbirds that live on the grain during the milk stage. Then perhaps you could talk without quarreling."

Mose made no reply. Page walked from the house and told Murray—

"I can't stand that bow-and-arrow woman."

"One of our best friends. I'd hate to be

the man she was shooting arrows at. Good as any Indian at that game."

The two remained near the open door, and Page smiled grimly as he heard Martha's gentle voice picking Mose's last story to pieces, leaving only a skeleton of fact. Mose retreated from her arraignment to wait outside until dinner was ready. He and Page declared a truce long enough to agree the woman was a nuisance and crazy.

Then came Papa Baptiste, wearing a new and brilliant-colored sash. As usual he brought gifts—a wooden pail of maple sugar and a string of prairie chickens. Halting before Page and Mose, whom he was meeting for the first time, he saluted them:

"I give you a good day, *m'sieurs*. I am Baptiste from the Red River Trail. I drove my carts from Fort Gray (Winnipeg) to St. Anthony in 'forty-seven. Ah! Those solid wooden wheels! It is a truth, *m'sieurs*, you could hear them squawking for three miles.

"You are new to Minnesota. I can tell you when I tapped maple trees on Nicollet Island and watched with a gun to stop the Sioux from stealing the sap. I saw the Indians many times smoke around the sacred stone on the prairie below Shakopee's village. Then later I saw white men take the gifts left on the stone for Tunkan, the Earth God. And now the stone has been stolen and sent to the East.

"The Sioux's memory is longer than the Red River Trail. The Sioux had a war dance a few days ago back of Fort Ridgely. They say they are going against the Chippewas. But the sacred stone is stolen, and the red memory is very long. You are called what, *m'sieurs?*"

Page and Mose gave their names, but did not seem to care for this new arrival and his ancient reminiscences. Papa Baptiste was quick to feel the chill in their bearing and with a little smile puckering his lips bowed and passed on to the doorway. He halted, and his dark eyes became worried as Martha stood before him.

"I give you a fair day, *m'm'selle,*" he muttered, sweeping off his skin hat.

She stared at him intently and murmured:

"You remember much of old days. Your heart is with the Sioux because their medicine stone is stolen. You are part Indian, aren't you?"

It was the old question. He knew she would ask it, and it always worried him. He bowed low again and replied:

"A bit of Chippewa on my grandmother's side, I am told, *m'm'selle*. My compliments to all in this house."

And instead of entering he placed his gifts on the log threshold at her feet and rejoined Page and Mose at the corner of the house. The two were arguing in low voices and paid him no heed. One moment he was with them. Then his head was bobbing above the grass as his pony bore him westward. By the time the Falls discovered that he had been there he was out of sight. They understood, as did the Crays, and were sorry he happened to come when Martha was present. When they sat down to dinner Martha remarked—

"The Chippewa man does not like me."

"He isn't Chippewa, Martha," corrected Mrs. Fall. "He is French."

"One drop of red paint will stain a pail of spring water," she softly said.

Then for a minute she stared down at her plate, but was seeing only a savage scene on the Red River Trail, the murder of her parents, and herself, a child, trying to wake them up after the murderers had fled. Mrs. Fall, used to her moods, spoke sharply to arouse her from the black spell. With a little start she lifted her head, glanced around the table and muttered:

"Sioux or Chippewa? Some time Martha will know."

After all the guests departed Fall suggested that he and Page take a short ride to the west.

"Next Sunday maybe we can start early and make a real land-seeing trip," he encouraged the other.

"You're the pilot," readily agreed Page. "I can take you from Taylor's Falls to Hannibal, Missouri, and call it play. But out here I might get lost within a mile of the house. Lord! To think of the old pilot houses and the ladies' names written on the winders!"

Mrs. Fall frowned and was pleased to note a lessening of confidence in the man's voice as he inquired—

"Any danger from Injuns?"

Fall smiled, winked at his wife and replied:

"Already afraid of losing your scalp? How about it when you're located seven miles from nowhere? If you homestead

you must get used to Indians. They're part of the scenery."

"Oh, I've seen quite a lot of Injuns. Know something about their ways. But the more I see of them the less I really know about them. Just hoping they won't get the notion I stole their medicine stone that the funny little Frenchman was telling us about outside."

AS SOON as Murray had finished his chores he told his mother he wished to walk down to the Pollacker place.

"They drink too much," she complained.

"I want to show them my rifle. I told Bert and Ed they could try it. I'll be back before dark."

The Pollacker brothers were reckless riders, fair marksmen, sturdy rough-and-tumble fighters, and held no Sabbath-day prejudice against shooting-matches. When Murray topped the last grassy ridge he was pleased to behold two men wrestling in front of the long shed. He swiftly ran down the slope and arrived on the scene just as the wrestlers crashed to the ground. Bert Pollacker began jeering at his brother, who was supposed to be one of the best men at rough sports on the Blue Earth River, but whose broad shoulders were pinned to the ground. Murray knew the winner of the bout must be the new hired man.

The two scrambled to their feet, and Bert waved a cordial greeting to Murray. The brothers had long ragged hair. The stranger was clean shaven and wore his hair short. Ed raged profanely and insisted:

"It was a —— trick. I can nail down any man in Minnesota if he don't use some —— trick."

"Oh, shut up!" laughed Bert. "Phil threw you fair and square. Wrestling is made up of tricks. Phil had a new one. And you're too drunk to wrestle anyway."

Murray began to regret coming. The atmosphere was quarrelsome. He had no fear of the brothers even when they were fighting drunk; but he disliked violence that was incited by liquor. The jug outside the shed door and the flushed faces of the men told him they had been drinking heavily. Ed especially, was inclined to ugly moods when under the influence of liquor. The stranger hoarsely asked—

"Who's Young Rifle?"

"Murray Fall; good neighbor. Murray, this is Phil White; working for us. He's been showing brother Ed how to lie on his back and watch the clouds."

"And Bert ended the introduction with a burst of laughter.

"By ——! There ain't no hired help in Blue Earth County that can pin me down twice!" bawled Ed. "We'll try it again, White. I'm on to that trick now."

"Maybe he has another one," chuckled Bert.

White's face grew sober of expression as he watched the angry man preparing to rush in. In a low voice he suggested:

"Let's call it off for now, Ed. You're a good man; better than I be. But we're both haired up with liquor, and you've plumb tired me out."

"Not by a —— sight! Bert's made cheap talk. He's too mouthy. He knows I can kick up his heels anytime we catch hold. He's tickled because your new trick fooled me. Watch out! I'm coming!"

He rushed in, and the two clinched and began maneuvering for the advantage. Murray loved the sport and held his breath as he watched. First one, then the other, appeared to be about to win. Murray wanted Ed to win, as he liked him immensely. After a minute, however, his knowledge of the sport convinced him his friend stood no chance with White.

"I could throw him myself as he is now," the boy sorrowfully told himself as he watched the men shuffle about.

He gave a little cry of surprize as White, standing back to him, suddenly toppled over, his shoulders smashing squarely into the turf.

"Is he down, Murray?" triumphantly yelled Ed, his eyes wild and angry.

Murray ran in and attempted to thrust his fingers under White's shoulders.

"Down fair and square, Ed. Get up."

Ed got to his feet and flopped his arms and crowed. Then he taunted:

"He seems to be out of tricks, Bert. But I'll make it two out of three so there won't be any question."

But White had had enough. He admitted:

"You're too strong and quick for me, Ed. No fun in being thrown as heavy as that. You won. Let's liquor up."

Ed, restored to good nature, took time to greet Murray boisterously and invited him to sample the jug. Murray shook his head, still wondering why White should

fall when his opponent had not tripped him. Bert, too, was eying the hired man curiously and remarked:

"Hope you're not losing your sand, Phil. The man who quits just because he's beat doesn't go very far in Minnesota."

White laughed good-naturedly and assured the other:

"Not a bit; but I'm wise. Why waste my strength on a friend? Ed's all right. No shame in being bested by him. What's Young Rifle going to drink?"

"Whisky too weak for you, Murray? Want some gunpowder to mix with it? Or do you want the same old dipper of milk?"

"You know Murray ain't fool enough to drink whisky," spoke up Bert.

"All right, old Sour-Face. I ain't tempting the young."

"I'll go inside by and by and help myself to milk," said Murray.

"Milk!" And Ed found the word very humorous. "Maybe he thinks we're 'most out of whisky. Well, Murray, we ain't got quite as much as we had a few days ago."

And he laughed as if immensely pleased.

White darted a glance at Bert, who angrily commanded:

"You keep shut, Ed. You're drunk. If we're short of whisky it's because we've drank so much of it."

"Our own best customers, old Sour-Face," chuckled Ed.

"Fine-looking gun you got there, young man. How's she shoot?" asked White.

"It's a new Spencer. I haven't tried it only twice. Fetched it over for Bert and Ed to try."

"Hooray! Let's have a match!" shouted Ed. "Stick a target on that elm and I'll show you some real shooting."

Murray produced eight cartridges, proudly loaded the rifle and then ran to fasten a shingle on the elm and blacken the center. When Murray returned White was examining the rifle. He threw it to his shoulder and fired without appearing to take aim and registered within an inch of the bull's eye.

Bert was loud in his praise. Ed swore it was an accident and that he would beat it. He raised the gun, but his nerves were unsteady from continuous drinking, and he waited a few moments before firing. The bullet nicked a lower corner of the shingle. Bert laughed derisively and took his turn, scoring the trunk a foot beneath the target. Murray shot and hit an upper corner.

Ed passed into one of his vicious moods. He walked to the jug and took a drink. White caught Bert's eye, frowned and shook his head. Then he took the gun and failed even to hit the tree. Ed laughed immoderately and during the momentary steadiness the last dram gave him he bettered his first shot by several inches.

Murray gave his place to White, who for the second time missed the tree. Bert announced it was time to think about food and went inside with Ed. Murray frankly told White—

"You let him throw you and outshoot you."

"Whisky puts the —— into him," White regretfully replied. "He can't drink and have a good time and let it go at that, as his brother can. When he gets whisky aboard he believes he can beat any one at anything. If he loses he gets ugly. 'Tween you 'n' me I sha'n't stay here very long. I like Bert; he's a mighty good fellow."

"So's Ed," Murray defended. "I like him. I'm sorry he drinks hard. But drunk or sober he's always good to me."

"That's enough to make a man like any man," heartily agreed White. "I like him, too. But I get tired of eating dirt every time he gets drunk. What happens when we're alone doesn't matter, but I hate to have to buckle down before a crowd. And I like him too well to fight him to a finish."

"Come in, Murray, and get your —— old milk!" roared Ed.

In passing through the shed into the kitchen Murray noticed that the stock of liquor was greatly reduced. A barrel was missing, as were all the jugs except the one outside the door. Cold meat and bread were on the table, and they ate standing up. Ed began a bragging recital of wrestling and fighting feats and vowed Murray should be tied to a chair and compelled to remain all night when the latter announced that he must be going home.

"Then my mother and Alice would be alone," explained Murray. "Father and Page are off land-looking."

Ed threw down the coil of rope his rough humor had prompted him to take from a hook, and, pawing Murray's hair over his eyes, he declared:

"Alice is a mighty nice little sister. Wish I had one. If I had a sister 'stead of that

fool ox of a Bert, she'd be bossing me round like a black slave. What'n —— you waiting for when you know your ma's waiting for you? Out of this house and off this farm, you young, thankless hound!"

There was never any doubt about it in Murray's mind; drunk or sober Ed was his favorite. He liked Bert, who always treated him as a man grown; but Ed with his rough talk and rough hands was his favorite. But the visit was not entirely satisfactory. Murray experienced an indefinable feeling of uneasiness as he walked home.

"Enjoy yourself?" asked his mother.

"Yes and no. I like the new man, Phil White. I've always liked Ed and Bert. But I wish Ed wouldn't drink so much. And too much of their whisky is gone."

"If they couldn't get any more it would be a good loss."

"I mean three men can't drink half a dozen jugs and a barrel of whisky in the time since Mr. Pollacker died," explained Murray.

Lowering her voice so that Alice, playing in a corner, could not hear, Mrs. Fall murmured—

"They've been selling to the Indians again?"

"Not a word to any one, not even to father," warned Murray. "You know how he would loud up. He might even make a complaint. They're our neighbors. I like them; Ed the best. It ought to be stopped; but I like them, and we must keep quiet."

"Yes, your father might talk," Mrs. Fall admitted. "But it's a cruel shame that the country should be spoiled by such works. In a few days the summer money will come; then there'll be more smuggling, more trouble. It's wrong, and it couldn't be kept up if the homesteaders would tell the agency people what they know. It's wrong for us not to tell, but I'll hold my tongue."

FALL and Page returned shortly after sundown. Page was quite enthusiastic over the rolling prairie land but confessed he had hoped to locate in a well-timbered country.

"I miss the trees and stumps," he explained.

"If you're going in for farming this is the country," Fall insisted. "If you want to build rafts, find timber."

That evening Mr. Cray and Lorin surprized the family by making another call. He lost no time in telling them:

"Just got word through Codfish Billings, who heard it at Shelbyville, that some one has run more liquor on to the reservation near the lower agency. A drunken Indian fired a gun at Marcis Gerrian, who works in the flour mill. Indian had a sawed-off shotgun under his blanket, and it's a wonder he didn't kill Garrian. I couldn't rest till I'd told you. I believe it's time the settlers got together and stopped whisky-smuggling."

"Good land!" gasped Mrs. Fall. "Tried to kill a white man!"

"Why did he have the gun sawed off?" asked Page.

"To carry under his blanket, of course," Fall impatiently told him.

From the doorway Murray explained for Page's benefit:

"They get good guns from the government and then spoil them. When they can't do anything else they drive tacks and brass nails into the woodwork and split the wood."

"But carrying a gun under a blanket means stealth. Means they plan to take two-legged critters by surprize," mused Page. "And the Injun who fired at Gerrian must have sawed off the barrel when he was sober. Old Pontiac's Injuns did that when they wanted to sneak guns into the Detroit fort."

"Oh, nothing like a premeditated plan to attack white folks in this case," assured Cray. "The Indian is Medicine Bottle, brother of Big Eagle."

"And Big Eagle belongs to the white man's party," spoke up Mr. Fall.

"Medicine Bottle belongs to the red man's party," said Page. "If trouble ever comes Big Eagle will go with his people, or he'll quit being leader and quit living."

"I've heard Medicine Bottle hates the whites," Cray admitted. "It's said he and other blanket Indians have been forming soldier lodges."

Then, observing the worried expression on Mrs. Fall's face, he hastily added—

"But the Sioux will never cause any trouble beyond committing a few murders when drunk."

"That'll be plenty bad enough for the folks murdered," remarked Page. "Too bad old Shakopee had to die. He was a strong

friend to the whites. His son, Little Six, hates us."

"How do you know all this?" asked Mr. Cray.

"Common talk on the St. Croix. Winnebagoes talk about it. Sioux coming to visit them talk about it. Don't make any difference if a chief does belong to the white man's party. He'll have to lead his men against us if trouble comes. Little Crow and Little Six, Mankato and Cut Nose and others, are out and out for Injuns keeping their long hair and blankets, for hunting and fishing where they like. But the Sioux are divided and playing politics among themselves all the time."

Mr. Cray returned to the object of his visit by repeating:

"The whisky selling ought to be stopped. Settlers ought to organize and stop it from reaching the border."

"Never supposed there was much of it going on," said Page.

"You're new to this part of the country," Cray shortly reminded him. "The government ought to make the Indians tell who's selling them whisky."

"Can't be done," Fall firmly declared. "They'd name some one who never sold them a drop. They might name me; or you, Cray."

"Probably you're right," sighed Cray. "But I'm glad I'm not located on the edge of the reservation."

A bugle call outside brought Page to his feet, his twisted face showing concern. Fall laughed and winked at Cray; then explained:

"Only the boy, Abner. He has an old bugle and has learned some of the calls. He's calling his tame hawk to be fed. Hawk ain't been around for some time. If he's within hearing and hungry he'll come."

Page stepped to the window and saw Murray's pet swoop down, alight and wait to be fed. Turning back from the window, he remarked:

"That's some medicine. If the Sioux saw that they'd say the boy was a big medicine man. They'd give him a red name. Little Crow would give all his ponies and other belongings if he could do that trick."

"You seem to be well posted on Indians for a river man," Cray said.

"Seen lots of them. Talked with lots of them."

When Cray set out for home Mr. Fall walked some distance with him, the two boys ranging ahead. Their talk was general until Fall halted to turn back. Then Cray asked—

"Know anything about your hired man?"

"River man. Working for his keep till he can locate."

"I'd swear I've seen him somewhere, perhaps on the reservation; only he was dressed differently. Hasn't located yet?"

"Hasn't any money. We're going land-looking some Sunday. He seems to want to be near timber."

"Queer characters, those river men," observed Cray. "Hard work to drive them from the river even they when can't earn their salt. Last class of men I'd expect to find down here. Perhaps he was a farmer before he took to the river."

Fall felt vaguely disturbed.

"I don't remember he said anything about farming to me. New Hampshire man originally. Are you hinting at anything, Cray?"

"Nothing except it's curious for an old river man to shift down here. You'd expect him to get a job on a Mississippi or a Minnesota boat. They're still using pilots wherever they use boats. They're making round trips daily from St. Paul to Carver, and giving regular service to St. Peter and Mankato. And the Mississippi is choked with boats. Our man was speaking how queer it was that Page should come down here. Of course Mose is a queer stick and probably jealous of Page's stories. Mose wants to do all the talking. I hushed him up, and yet he said something that sticks in my mind."

"What could he say about Page?" demanded Fall.

"Only this: The Blue Earth country is a mighty good place for a man to come *if he wants to hide.*"

TO BE CONTINUED

East or West

by Charles Victor Fischer

Author of "Salt on a Bird's Tail," "The Gunner's Big Cruise," etc.

THINGS looked rosy for "Buck" Delton. The discharge of a chief electrician had left a vacancy at the head of the gunboat *Wheeler's* radio force; and Buck, being the only electrician, first-class, in the gang, hence senior man, looked good for the cap and brass buttons.

There were no available chiefs at the receiving-ship in San Francisco, where the *Wheeler* was at the time. And with the *Wheeler* scheduled to sail for Manila in two days, and the entire Pacific Fleet in southern waters, there was scarcely a possibility of Buck losing out. There wasn't time to transfer a chief from some other ship.

Buck roamed the decks a happy tar. The promotion meant a great deal more than the wearing of the cap and brass buttons. It meant more dollars a month from Uncle Sammy. And Buck stood greatly in need of those more dollars. He had a widowed mother and two kid brothers to whom those more dollars meant much.

A big youngster of twenty-six, this Buck; a hundred and eighty pounds of brawn and good nature. He had often been told he belonged in the blacksmith shop instead of the radio office. He was dark, had curly brown hair and gray eyes. His was no parlor face, nor yet one that would win a prize at a dog show.

Buck continued roaming the decks a happy tar till the afternoon the *Wheeler* was to sail. Then everything went smash. What blasted his hopes was the arrival of one "Cocky" Wild.

Cocky came alongside in a receiving-ship launch. He dumped his bag and hammock on the deck and clicked heels before the officer of the deck with much of a military snap. He was a snappy boy. After being assigned his billet, and stowing his bag and hammock, Cocky strutted aft to the radio office as only a peacock can strut.

Cocky was a well-made boy of twenty-four; of medium height, square shoulders, his body tapering down to slimness at the hips. He was a good-looking boy, too, in a delicate, feminine way. But no one had to tell Cocky that. He had small, regular features, ruddy complexion, light hair and irresponsible blue eyes that flashed much of self-esteem.

The trouble was, Cocky was also an electrician first-class. But he was senior in service to Buck by a year. Besides, he had held the rate of first-class much longer than Buck had. As Navy regulations go, the rate of chief was Cocky's—unless he fell down on the examination.

Cocky took charge at once. He relieved Buck as acting chief, took over all the books, records, keys, went over the stores and equipment, inspected the radio outfit from antenna down—went up both masts and critically examined blocks, halyards and spreaders; for he knew that official eyes were on him and he wanted them to note his snappy efficiency. Then with the lordly

air of a chief proper he assigned the members of his force their cleaning stations. And finally, after setting the watches, he strutted up to the executive officer and reported the radio department ready for sea.

COCKY made a decided hit with the executive officer. Late that afternoon, when the *Wheeler* had dropped the pilot outside the Golden Gate, and was steaming southwest for Honolulu, the executive commented with enthusiasm on Cocky to Commander Winnie, the skipper. They stood together out on the starboard bridge-wing.

"I rather like this new man, Wild, sir," said the executive. "He takes hold of things. Why, sir, he hadn't been aboard two hours before he had the radio department at his fingers' ends!"

Commander Winnie nodded ever so slightly, his strong, handsome but melancholy face puckered into folds and creases, his dark-gray tigerish eyes squinting at the setting sun off the starboard bow. He stood six feet, was lean, big-boned. He was forty-five.

"He's rather young and boyish looking," the executive went on, "but he seems full of sound sense, along with plenty pep and go."

"Yes, I've sized him up," Winnie replied, without turning his head. "But the point is we wanted to rate Delton chief."

"But Wild is senior in every way, sir. Besides, I'm rather inclined to think Wild is the more efficient man."

Winnie shot him a glare.

"Isn't that jumping to a rather hasty opinion?" he chided. "Why not wait till we see what this new youngster can do? He may be nothing more than a flash. If he is I'll soon enough know it. You know—" he hesitated, then lowered his tone—"I've had a couple of tours of radio duty. I know operators. There's nothing flashy, as operators go, about Delton. But he's reliable. Conscientious. He plugs. He's careful. Moreover he's clean. And I don't purpose to see some irresponsible, cyclonic young jackass slip aboard and scoop this rate away from him."

"Of course, if Wild runs true to form we can't conscientiously rate a junior man over his head. Delton will simply have to wait."

"Just let me watch this Wild for a few days. I know operators. I can sit in and operate a bit myself." He grinned, and added: "Well enough to make a mess of it."

There ended the conversation, so far as Buck and Cocky were concerned.

Of course this had all been overheard by men on the bridge, for gobs have keen ears. Soon it was being whispered broadcast.

Buck heard it with indifference. It meant nothing to him. He had given up the hope anyway. Much as the promotion meant to him and his, he didn't want it over a senior man's head. Cocky rated it. Let him have it.

With Cocky it was different. The whispered fragments of the conversation on the bridge made him uneasy. He was not so much tickled at learning of his drag with the executive officer. Not when Buck had a greater drag with Winnie. Winnie was the Big Noise. A drag with the executive would help, of course. But to bring home the ham he would have to show Winnie.

Now Cocky Wild had a way of showing the higher-ups. Always, on every ship he had been, whenever Cocky wanted something—special liberty, special money, special anything—the night before making his request he would turn in pages and pages of broadcast press items. And it was *press*. Not the common dry, cut-up, unintelligible stuff usually broadcast by radio. Verily no! Cocky's press was worth reading. There would be items and items of shipwrecks, train smash-ups, robberies, murders, suicides, strikes—and all neatly typed, dashed off in flowing manner, and each incident told in full, not cut up. Then the next day, of course, Cocky made his request and it was granted.

The first night out Cocky took the mid watch. In addition to all the official busi-business, he copied five big sheets of very thrilling press items. At least he *turned in* five big sheets of press items. Several carbon copies of these were made by the executive's yeoman and posted on the bulletins.

Cocky's prestige with his shipmates went soaring. The gob at sea craves news from land. Here was an operator who turned in press news, not only that a fellow could read, but that was interesting to read. Fascinating! It was like reading so many pages of short stories. They read Cocky's press with lolling tongues.

The second night out he turned in four

sheets; the third night three. He didn't take the mid watch on the fourth night, for the reason that Buck Delton had the watch that night. Cocky wanted Winnie to see the vast difference between his and Buck's operating abilities.

Buck got all the press there was to get that night, a measly sheet of cut-up, unintelligible stuff. The next morning the executive sent for him.

"Delton," he began, "how is it the rest of you fellows can't copy the press as Wild does? Look." He held out the sheet Buck had turned in. "Can you make any sense out of it?"

"No, sir," Buck answered. "Not out of most of it. But that's the way it was sent, sir."

"Bosh! Same old cry! 'The way it was sent, sir.' You sit there and lose two words out of three. Then—'The way it was sent, sir.' I'll tell you something, Delton. And you may as well pass it along to the rest of that gang of mummies. All of you will have to come out of it!"

Buck took the bawling out, which was all he could do. He had his own ideas about Cocky's press. He might have told the executive he didn't have Cocky's fertile imagination. He didn't tell him that.

This was progress for Cocky. But Cocky was unsatisfied. For as yet Winnie had not slapped him on the back. He had made rapid strides with the executive, but no apparent headway with the Big Noise.

Cocky thought long and hard that day. Toward late afternoon the idea came. He saw a way of throwing Buck in bad and himself in good.

A slack rat-tail gave Cocky the idea. Looking aloft he saw that the rat-tail—the connecting wire between the antenna and the receiving-set—was swinging widely with the ship's roll, so that it almost contacted with one of the steel guys. Should it contact, this would form what is called a "swinging ground." That is, each time the rat-tail touched or lay against the guy, the antenna would be grounded, and the operator on watch would have his signals blocked out.

This could be remedied by taking a piece out of the rat-tail. Another way was to go aloft, about half-way up the mainmast and, with a heaving-line lasso the rat-tail, pull it in close to the mast and make fast, and thus take the slack out of it.

That evening Cocky sent Buck aloft. He sent him up just before dark. It took Buck an hour, working in the dark, to rope that rat-tail and bring it in to the mast.

A little later Cocky himself crawled aloft. He wore a suit of blue dungaree, so that no one would notice him. Cocky went up and did something to the antenna halyard, the hoisting rope. He cut two strands of it. He made rough cuts. Of course he wasn't fool enough to do this at the exact place where Buck had been working. That would have been too raw. He cut those strands of the rope at a point about twenty feet above where Buck had hauled in the rat-tail. He was a tricky Cocky.

That done, he crawled down and went to the cleat on which the halyard was made fast. Throwing the halyard off all but one turn he commenced heaving. Heaving with one hand, taking up the slack with the other over the cleat, he yanked and yanked, till there was nothing more to yank, till he had in all the slack, till it was taut, and then made fast. Then he went below and crawled into his hammock.

Cocky figured that the dampness of the night would shrink the halyard. Taut as it was, and with two strands cut, the rope was bound to part before morning.

It parted shortly after midnight. Down came the antenna, twisting and tangling itself about the smoke-stacks, ventilators—a nasty mess for the radio gang to get out of their hammocks and get busy on.

The executive officer hadn't turned in yet. He happened to be in the charthouse. He couldn't understand. The *Wheeler* was supposed to have received new halyards, guys, blocks, everything aloft, during her recent period in the navy yard. He sent for Cocky.

Cocky brought the parted halyard, coiled in his hand. He presented the two cut strands to the executive. The executive grinned.

"What do you think about it, Wild?"

"Bad business to think, sir, in a case like this."

"But what could be the idea?"

"I can't answer that either, sir. Unless—" Cocky stopped.

"Unless what?"

"Well, sir, that halyard parting hits *me*. I'm in charge of this ship's radio, and responsible for things being shipshape."

A moment of silence. Then Cocky added:

"But it couldn't be that, sir. I guess I'm naturally suspicious. I've got no enemies on the ship."

"Sure?"

"I'm positive, sir. I've never done anything to make any one dislike me."

"No-o-o," the executive pronounced slowly. "I don't believe you have."

He paused a moment. His eyes showed that he was thinking. Then:

"By the way, Wild, who was your last man aloft?"

Cocky had the craft to pretend evasion.

"Why, sir," he answered. "I don't think any of my gang did it. Some seaman, sir, for the devilment of the thing——"

"Answer me. Who was your last man aloft?"

"Why—Delton, sir. He was up last evening just after dark. I sent him up to pull the rat-tail in close to the mast. She was slack, sir, and I was afraid she'd ground against a guy."

The executive had his eyes on the coil of line in Cocky's hand.

"About how high up the mast was it where Delton pulled in the rat-tail?"

"Half way up, sir. But, sir, I don't think Delton did it. Of course, he and I are not the best of friends. But he wouldn't do that."

"That's fair enough of you, Wild," the executive said indulgently. "But you just quit thinking in this matter. *We'll* do the thinking. Now go ahead aft and get your antenna up again. What are you going to do, splice that line?"

"I'll have to, sir. Quicker than reeving off a new one."

"Very well. Go ahead and do it. Then in the morning we'll see how near that splice comes to where Delton hauled in the rat-tail. You say it was dark when he went aloft?"

"Yes, sir. But, sir, I can't believe Delton did it."

"Tut-tut. Go."

Later, after the halyard had been spliced, taken aloft and passed through the block, and the antenna hoisted, Cocky took Buck to one side.

"Listen, Buck," he purred. "I don't want you to get any wrong ideas about this thing. You know that line was cut. Some deckhand did it, probably just for the fun of the thing. At least that's what I think. I told the Exec. that, but he shut me up. Asked me a lot of questions. Who was aloft last? When? Without ever an idea what was at the back of his head I told him you were up last night."

"That was right."

"No! I never should have told him you went up. —— it all, Buck, if I'd had any idea he'd get such a fool notion, I' have told him I went up myself and pulled in that rat-tail."

"Aw, to —— with that," Buck growled. "And so he thinks I cut those two strands. Is that it?"

"That's the whole —— thing, Buck. I'd rather take a punch in the snoot than have you think——"

"Who says I think anything?" Buck laughed. "Do you suppose I care what the Exec. thinks? I didn't do it."

"I know you didn't," Cocky replied truthfully. "I kept trying to tell him. But he shut me up."

THE next morning Buck came up before Commander Winnie to answer questions.

They stood gathered about a high portable desk—the Bar of Judgment—back on the quarter-deck. Behind the desk stood the judge—Winnie. On one side stood the executive; on the other the ship's writer and the chief master-at-arms. Before the desk stood the culprit—Buck.

On the side lines, over near the rail loafed the slippery Cocky Wild. He was standing by to make an elaborate play for Winnie's favor. He had his little piece thoroughly memorized.

"Delton," Winnie began, "what do you think of Wild?"

"In what way, sir?"

"Well—just personally."

"I don't like him, sir," Buck answered bluntly.

The executive shot Winnie a glance. Then, "Why?" he snapped at Buck.

"Because I don't like him, sir."

The executive reddened. Winnie grinned.

"I can't tell you why, sir," Buck added. "All I can say is I don't like his ways—nor his looks."

Winnie said:

"How do you two hit it off in line of duty?"

"Fine, sir. No arguments."

"Have you any feelings against Wild in regard to this rate question?"

"No, sir. I admit I was disappointed when he came aboard. But that's got nothing to do with my not liking him."

A few moments' silence. Then Winnie looked Buck straight in the eye and said—

"Delton, did you cut that halyard?"

Buck looked him straight back and replied:

"No, sir. It would hardly pay me to monkey around with such tricks as that, with people at home depending on me."

Winnie looked at the executive. The executive studied Buck hard. Winnie turned to the ship's writer and said—

"Cross it off."

Here Cocky danced up and made his little play. He clicked heels before Winnie and saluted.

"Captain, may I have a word to say?"

"You certainly may," grinned Winnie.

"Well, sir," yammered the monkey, "I'd like to state that although I've only been shipmates with Delton a few days, and although personally we don't love each other—at the same time I'd like to state that he's a white man and a straight shooter and a man that always tried his best at all times, and I'd like to state that I don't think he'd pull such a low-down trick."

"Low down?" Winnie looked aloft at the spliced halyard. "I'd call it a *high-up* trick." He turned to the executive. "Wouldn't you?"

And thus the inquiry broke up, all hands grinning.

Cocky felt that he had made progress. He hadn't succeeded in throwing Buck in bad, but he had made himself a little more solid. That little I'd-like-to-state speech must have made some impression on the Big Noise, he thought. It looked big—a man stepping up to the defense of his rival. Cocky felt tickled with himself. He had strengthened his drag with the executive and got a foothold on Winnie's affections. Progress.

COCKY knocked off his rottenness for several days. Meanwhile the *Wheeler* put in to Honolulu, coaled, gave "liberty" and steamed out again. Her next port of call was the Island of Guam, 3330 miles very nearly west.

Cocky let things ride till three days out of Honolulu. About then he commenced to chafe again. He had put in a request to be examined for chief. The request had lain on Winnie's deck unsigned for three days. Cocky worried. He squirmed and fidgeted about decks like a dope fiend unable to get it. Finally, unable to stand the suspense any longer, he got the ear of Winnie's yeomen.

"The truth of the thing is this, Cocky," said the yeoman: "The old man thinks a whole lot of Buck Delton. Oh, he likes you too. You'll get the rate all right. But he wants to make sure of you. Just keep on the chalk-line and you'll soon be chief. The executive officer is pulling hard for you. Have patience."

Cocky knew the word "patience" only as he saw it on the printed page. What he wanted, he wanted right now.

Once more he leaned over the rail scheming long and hard, as he looked down upon the water swirling and eddying against the ship's side. The ship was rolling heavily, but it was a long steady roll. She lay far over, but she did it slowly, easily. Cocky hung there for an hour. The idea wouldn't come. Finally he turned and leaned with his back to the rail looking up at the rat-tail, still lashed close to the mast.

Suddenly a full grown idea jumped into his head. With the ship rolling like this, if that rat-tail were cast loose, and the antenna lowered a dozen feet or so, then wo to the operator on watch—particularly if it happened during Pearl Harbor's broadcast period, when all the official business came through. What a beautiful goat-getter that swinging ground would be. Easiest thing in the world. Cast loose the rat-tail and lower the antenna—that was it. And with Buck Delton on the mid watch tonight, during Pearl Harbor's broadcast. Cocky's blue eyes danced with inspiration.

BUCK Delton came on watch at midnight. At twelve-thirty the high-powered naval radio station at Pearl Harbor, Oahu, commenced broadcasting a string of *Alnav* messages—messages from the Navy Department to all naval ships and stations.

Things went well with Buck for two messages. The atmosphere was heavy with electric discharge, static; but Pearl Harbor came in strong, and Buck was able to copy on the typewriter.

Then suddenly things went wrong. He

lost the first word of the third *Alnav*. He hadn't heard the word. Instead of a word there had been a totally blank space. Buck thought at the moment that a gob of static had paralyzed the audion bulb. But there followed more blank spaces. Nor were they caused by static; the bulb glowed brightly through each of them. Buck suddenly realized that he wasn't getting half of what was being sent. The message blank in the typewriter was covered with meaningless groups.

Soon fragments of the preamble told him Pearl Harbor was commencing another message. He tore the half received message out of the typewriter and inserted a blank. It was the same story over. He wasn't getting half of it.

Then he noticed something. Every time the ship lay over to port his signals were blocked out. Buck snapped. The trouble was aloft. A swinging ground. That rat-tail had got loose!

Buck abandoned the next message and went tearing up to the topside. Sure enough. It was a bright moonlight night. He could see and hear the rat-tail slapping from side to side with the roll of the ship. Every time she lay over to port the rat-tail wrapped itself round the steel guy. No wonder the stuff was being blocked out on him.

Another thing: the after end of the antenna was low; the after spreader sagged askew. That was why the rat-tail was so slack.

Buck ran back to the mainmast, threw the halyard off the cleat and heaved. When he had hoisted the antenna all the way up, the rat-tail no longer fouled the steel guy.

Buck ran back down to the radio office and put on the 'phones. Too late. Pearl Harbor had finished her broadcast and was now working with Cavite in the Phillippines. And there was small chance of getting a repetition of those messages, because the *Wheeler* carried a weak transmitter. She was already out of her sending range from Pearl Harbor.

Two hours later, when Pearl Harbor finished her schedule with Cavite, Buck tried. No use. He called Pearl Harbor a dozen times but got no reply.

Below in his hammock Cocky snickered in his mattress. He had thrown the hooks into Buck Delton this time.

The loss of those messages hurt Buck. Even Winnie balled him out.

"It's all right about the swinging ground, Delton," said the skipper next morning. "That in itself is an excuse. But the point is, you made that rat-tail fast up there yourself. If you'd done it properly it wouldn't have got loose."

And Buck had no comeback.

EARLY in the evening of the fourth day out of Honolulu Winnie sent for Cocky.

"Say, Wild," he said, "what's the matter with the press news lately? We haven't had any of that good stuff of yours in some time. All we're getting is that stale, cut-up rot from Pearl Harbor."

"Well, sir," Cocky replied glibly, "the static is pretty heavy down in this part of the world. Pretty hard to snare any long distance dope."

"Yes, I know. But what's static to a top-notcher?"

Had Winnie added, "like you," Cocky would have burst, so swelled full with vanity was he. He was so swelled full of conceit that it welled up to his throat and blocked his speech. Winnie continued:

"Now if you could hook on to Chosi, Japan, at about—oh, eleven-twenty, our time, I think you'd get some darn good press. They send it out in English. You ought to be able to make it. Couple thousand miles."

The cap and brass buttons loomed large and glorious before Cocky's swimming vision. Press? He could eat it!

"By George, Captain," he gushed, "I'll sure give 'em a rub tonight, sir. If it's there to be got I'll get it—if the static gives me half a chance."

"That's the talk."

Then Winnie leaned forward and uttered words of magic.

"Wild, turn us in some good press news from Chosi, Japan, tonight—and before tomorrow noon you'll be a chief electrician radio. We'll shoot you through the examination so fast it'll make you dizzy."

AT ELEVEN o'clock that evening Cocky entered the radio office bearing a large bowl of thick coffee, sponged from the fire-room. He had found that coffee stimulated his imaginative forces.

"All right, Stumpy," he said to the operator on watch. "I'll take the watch. The old man wants some press."

Stumpy Frick arose and handed over the phones.

"All right, Cocky," he replied. "But if you can copy anything through this static you're a hoss."

Cocky put on the 'phones standing up and stood listening. In the forefront of his vain mind was the satisfying thought that these lowly subordinates would knock off calling him "Cocky," promptly at noon tomorrow. They'd address him as "Chief", or, by George, they'd wish they had. For a few moments he listened to the crack and crash in the phones. Finally, with a disdainful sniff he turned to Stumpy and said:

"Why, that's no static at all. I can hear Chosi, Japan. She's just opening up with press.

With that Cocky sat down and took a swig of coffee. He tuned on the receiver a moment, then swung round to the typewriter and inserted a large sheet. His fingers danced on the keys. Across the top of the sheet he typed:

PRESS. FROM CHOSI, JAPAN.

With Chosi some two thousand miles away, small wonder Stumpy followed his movements with awe in his eyes. Stumpy wouldn't have believed anything with human ears could pick signals out of such a roar of electric discharge as was in the air that night. So wild was the ether with crunching, hissing, crackling static that at times Stumpy had thought the phones would jump from his head.

Cocky turned and looked him up and down.

"You know, Stumpy, I don't like to have any one looking over my shoulder when I'm copying press."

Stumpy went. Cocky's fingers then commenced clicking the keys to the tune of about fifty words a minute. He wrote:

Naples, Italy. Underground den containing two hundred anarchists, several tons of dynamite, bombs, nitroglycerin, explosives, machine-guns, knives, pistols, rifles, captured by local police, after a battle that waged long and terrific and bloody. Many stabbed and shot.

Cocky paused to roll and light a cigaret. This must be good stuff. He must make it a master stroke. The cap and brass buttons were all but his. No longer would they call him Cocky. He wrote on:

Exact number dead and wounded not definitely ascertained.

Written plans taken, revealing attempts soon to be made on lives of many prominent Americans. Two buildings on Wall St., N. Y., to be blown up in near future; also four on State St., Chicago.

There ended Cocky's press. As he sat there willing his imagination to produce the next "thriller," through the roaring static he heard something. Faint signals clamoring to be heard. It was a high-frequency spark note—so high of pitch that it was almost a whistle. It sounded like a chick, pecking its way to life.

Cocky's hands came up to the phones. He pressed them close to his ears, then drew them gently away. Reaching out to the receiver he tuned ever so carefully. He sat back, hands on the phones, alternately working them close to and away from his ears. He spat out his cigaret and swore. A dot, a dash, now and then a full letter, was the best he could distinguish out of that uproar. The air was wild, crazy!

"To —— with her," quoth Cocky, and swung round to his typewriter. The cap and brass buttons was the big idea.

Cocky had in mind:

London. Attempt made on life of——

But he didn't write it. At that moment, out of the rumble and crunch and crack came something that caused Cocky to stiffen. A moment later he heard that something again and he came up out of the chair as if he'd been stung by a bee.

There was an S. O. S. in the air!

OH, BUT try to get it! Try to pick out and piece together the letters and numerals that ship in distress was sending—garble her position. Static! Every description of "stray" known to wireless was in the air that night. It came in at times like the shriek of a locomotive, would burst like a thunderclap and die off in a long, sustained hiss like that of escaping steam. There were short, sharp cracks, like rifle-fire, the barkers. And crunchers, that paralyzed the audion bulb. And long rollers, that sounded like the roar of falling water and that lasted for many seconds. It was all wave lengths, all frequencies. There was no tuning it out.

She had stopped calling and was now sending her position. Cocky's chair squeaked like a sick pig, and he squirmed like one. He heard:

GIT—*crash*—DE—160—*boom—roar*

Then all he heard for two minutes was now and then a faint *peep*. He studied the combination before him. Finally he wrote LON before the G, and U between the T and D, making—

LONGITUDE 160

From then on Cocky tried as he never had before. He worked every trick in his trick-filled head to get that ship's position. He listened with the 'phones two inches from his ears; one inch; pressed tight. He listened with one ear—often an effective way of working through static. He shifted from ear to ear. He listened with an ear and a half—with one 'phone full on, the other half on.

She was sending her position over and over. He had plenty time. But try to get it, through that roar!

Cocky filled sheet after sheet with letters and numerals. For nearly an hour he strove to wrest those barely audible dots and dashes from the raging ether. Fully thirty times she repeated before he managed to get down her latitude. By midnight he had filled a dozen sheets with letters and numerals. The desk was littered with letter- and numeral-covered sheets. Yet he didn't have it all. The best he could make out of the muddled mess was:

LONGITUDE 160—ST. LATITUDE 18 NORTH.

He had it, almost—all but two letters. That blank space before the ST was the bee in Cocky's shirt. Before those two letters went either EA or WE. It was either *east* or *west*. But which? The rest of it he was positive of.

Out of a desk drawer Cocky took an atlas of the world, and opened it out to a map of the Pacific. He noted those two points on the map—160 degrees east longitude, and 160 degrees west longitude. There was no way of puzzling it out. It could be either EAST or WEST. The *Wheeler* was approaching the 180th meridian of longitude—the international date line. From her position, the ship in distress could be on either of those two longitudinal lines—160 east, or 160 west—and be heard by radio. In fact the *Wheeler* was very nearly midway between those two points, with about twelve hundred miles separating her from each. If the word was *east*, the ship was ahead; if *west*, astern. On those two letters hung everything.

But strive as he would Cocky could not get those two letters. They would not come. It seemed to Cocky they were not being sent. Again and again he heard groups he already had. He heard ST a dozen times or more. Once he heard the full word LONGITUDE. Again, in momentary lulls he would hear 160, or 18, or NORTH. But always those two letters before the ST, the two letters that would make Cocky Wild the hero of the hour, were blocked out.

Cocky lost himself. He tore the undershirt on him into ribbons, bit the pencil in half, threw paper-weights at the bulkhead. He yanked off the 'phones, spat at them, then threw them down on the deck and went dancing round and round, cursing, snarling, punching the air, till finally, realizing that this was getting him nowhere, he fell back in the chair, put on the 'phones and went pawing through the sheets scattered about him.

Not an EA or a WE could he find on any of the scribbled sheets. It certainly did seem as if those two letters were not being sent!

She was still sending. Cocky strove on. He needed only *one* letter; an A or a W before that ST and he would have it. But it would not come!

Had he heard her call letters, when she opened up, he might have a chance. If he knew what ship it was he might, by learning what route she usually followed, be able to form something like an idea. If. But then there was a chance of getting her call letters when she signed off.

If only she would sign off. He could break in and get her to repeat just those two letters. It wasn't necessary for her to keep repeating over and over what he already had. It was only a waste of time and power. The sending operator ought to be shot at sunrise!

She didn't sign off at all. She just quit, abruptly. Cocky heard:

LO—*crash*—TUDE—*spat*—60—*crack*—ST

Then one of those long rollers blocked out everything. When it broke, there were no more signals in the air.

Cocky strained. Minutes passed. He could hear nothing but static. She had quit. They had abandoned her.

Cocky opened up with full power, made the general call and signed off. A Japanese

cruiser answered. Cocky asked the Jap if he had heard the S. O. S. The Jap politely replied—

"No, sir."

Cocky returned "thanks," then made the general call again and signed off. No one answered. He tried several times. The only ship he could raise was the Japanese cruiser. That region of the Pacific was static-bound.

The Japanese cruiser now came back requesting particulars. Cocky paid no attention to him. He was busy with his atlas again.

He made tiny crosses at those two points on the map—160 east, and 160 west longitude, both on 18 degrees north latitude. Then he considered. It could hardly be east longitude, he reasoned; that would put her nearly four hundred miles west of Wake Island, far to the north of the charted route, Honolulu to Guam. She *could* be there, but it wasn't probable. Cocky didn't think she was there.

On the other hand, if he made the word west. Ah! There it was! That would put her right on a charted track, according to the map before him—on the Suva to Honolulu route. She must be there! She had to be! The word was west.

Cocky picked up the pencil, but hesitated. It was a chance. And yet in what way? Who could prove he hadn't received those two letters? How? Who could prove *anything* with such wild static in the air? If the last dot of the P were blocked off, the operator would hear it as a W. If the dash of an A were drowned out, he would hear only the dot, making E. They couldn't prove a thing!

And how about his cap and brass buttons? Suppose he turned in the message just as he had it, with the most important word gone? Why, Winnie wouldn't know what to do; whether to keep on going or put about and head back. Besides, what would Winnie think of him, Cocky, a "top-notcher"? Why, Winnie would forthwith put him down for a "ham". Small chance he would have then for the cap and brass buttons.

His best bet was to turn in that message complete. He must take a chance on that word.

He wrote WE before the ST.

As he arose, taking off the 'phones, the door opened and Winnie's orderly entered.

"Say, Cocky," said the marine, "the old man wants to know if you've got any press yet."

"Press ——!" Cocky half shouted. "I've got something a —— of a lot more important! Where is he, on the bridge?"

"No; down in the cabin. Him and the Exec. have both been sittin' up waitin' for press."

IN FIFTEEN seconds Cocky was down in the cabin, clicking heels before Winnie. The skipper sat in a deep chair smoking a big black cigar; a bath robe covered his six feet of leanness. In a chair near him sat the executive; he was in uniform. Here was Cocky's golden opportunity to clinch the cap and buttons. When he left this cabin it would be "All hail, Cocky!"

"Well, Wild, how about the press?" said Winnie blithely.

With a toss of his head Cocky threw the bangs back out of his eyes.

"Why, Captain," he answered, handing over the sheet, "I'd no more than got started than this broke in on me."

Winnie read it and then handed it to the executive.

"That's an S. O. S., sir," Cocky added.

It struck Cocky in that moment that neither Winnie nor the executive betrayed the least excitement. They sat looking at each other, Winnie smiling, the executive staring as if in a sort of stupor.

"You're dead sure of this message, Wild?" asked Winnie, who continued to smile.

"Oh, absolutely, sir."

"You didn't garble any of it?"

"Not a letter, sir," Cocky lied. "Only trouble was, sir, I didn't get her call letters. You see, sir, when she opened up I was on Chosi's tune, copying press."

Winnie puffed at his cigar a moment.

"Then how did you know it was an S. O. S.?" he queried. "Doesn't a ship first make S. O. S., and follow that with her call letters?"

The question staggered Cocky slightly. Apparently Winnie understood the inside of radio. He must tread lightly.

"Well, yes, sir," Cocky answered. "That's the proper way to send an S. O. S. But this fellow didn't do that. Some ham on watch, sir. Either that or he was excited. Anyhow he broke right off from S. O. S. to the word 'Longitude'."

"He did, eh?" Winnie drawled, his gray tigerish eyes fixed on Cocky in a way that made Cocky nervous.

A short silence.

"The point is, Wild," Winnie went on, "we want to make sure of that ship's position. If you've garbled any of it, now is the time to speak up. Don't be afraid. I know radio. I understand. I know that under the static conditions in this part of the world an operator can't get everything. I know that a man will stick in a few letters or a word now and then, rather than fight for it."

"Not me, sir."

Cocky would have those brass buttons and cap, if it cost the lives of a shipload of people.

"I always turn in a message exactly as it's sent, sir," he added with a touch of well-feigned pride. "I've turned you in that ship's position just as that ham sent it, sir. He was an awful ham."

"He was, eh?" Winnie drawled, and then turned to the executive.

"Well? Was I right?"

The executive was fixing Cocky with wide, glaring eyes. Winnie spoke again. His voice was hard, cold.

"He'd make a fine chief petty officer, wouldn't he?"

The executive nodded, without taking his eyes off Cocky. He said:

"Wild, I'm astounded!"

"I'm not even surprized," said Winnie, grinning. "He's done just what I expected him to do."

Cocky was shifting from one leg to the other. His knees had suddenly commenced to shirk. What were they talking about? What did they have on him? They seemed to have him somewhere, somehow. They seemed to know he had garbled that message. But how could they? He was afraid to meet Winnie's gaze.

Winnie stood up. He towered a head over Cocky. His eyes blazed.

"Wild—" through his soles Cocky felt the deck vibrate with that voice—"you're rotten at the core. The tricks with which you've been trying to undermine Delton since we left 'Frisco are worthy of a rat! But I didn't so much mind that, because I had my eye on you, and the only one you were harming was yourself. But when you go taking chances on a ship in distress—then, my lad, you're flirting with a tour in the penitentiary!"

"That's where he belongs," the executive interposed.

They had him! Cocky knew it now. Giddiness took hold of him. He commenced to reel drunkenly. Vision was blurred. He saw Winnies and Winnies and execs. and execs. He felt snakes and lizards inside of him, that crawled about and gnawed at the pit of his stomach and seemed to draw all there was of him into a ball.

"I dud-don't understand, sus-sir," he managed to stutter.

"You don't? Then look over your head."

Cocky did. And then he did understand. What he saw was a small antenna of six wires, stretched across the cabin. It was only a miniature affair, such as two boys living across the street from each other might play with. He noted that the tiny rat-tail led down to a desk over in a darkened corner.

"Go over there and take a look at my transmitting outfit," Winnie commanded.

"Go ahead, go ahead!" as Cocky stood there swaying like the drunk on the curb, who makes you wonder what keeps him from falling.

Cocky staggered across the cabin. What he saw on the desk, connected by the rat-tail with the miniature antenna, was a tiny, high-frequency buzzer, such as they use in connection with a receiving-set to test a crystal detector.

It was all clear enough now. Winnie had sent that S. O. S.

"I repeated that position about fifty times," Winnie said, "and not once did I send you the word *west*. All I sent was ST."

Winnie called in the orderly.

"Go find Delton," he said to the marine. "Tell him I want him."

"As for you, Wild," he went on to Cocky, "I'll admit we haven't anything on you that you couldn't squirm out of. Oh, we could run you over the road, if we felt disposed to try hard enough. But you'd be just slippery enough to get yourself restored to duty in a few months, and then the Navy would be no better off than it is now. You're a cancer to the service.

"First thing you do in the morning will be report to the chief engineer. We'll let you shovel coal till we get to Guam. We'll drop you off there and let you wait for the next

transport back. Don't try any slippery stuff in 'Frisco. It won't do you any good, after the letter I write to the commanding officer there. You'll get a straight kick-out. You're —— lucky to get that. Go forward."

BUCK DELTON entered the cabin, sleepy-eyed, disheveled, in pants and undershirt.

"Delton, you look as if you've been having bad dreams," observed Winnie smiling.

Buck grinned, blinked and gave his head a shake to clear away the cobwebs.

"No, sir," he replied. "Good dreams. Dreamt I was home on a furlough rollin' over the floor with my two kid brothers, sir."

Winnie smiled. "Then I'm sorry we had to break you out. The fact is, Delton, there's no one on watch in the radio office. I want you to break out the man with the mid watch."

Buck said, "Aye, aye, sir," and started out.

"Wait a minute, Delton," Winnie checked him. "Where are you sleeping?"

"Forward on the gun-deck, sir; starboard side."

"All right. Now Delton, after you break out the man with the mid watch, lash up your hammock and stow it. Then go down to the chief petty officers' quarters and find yourself a bunk. You'll find three or four vacant. Beginning in the morning, eat on the chief petty officers' mess."

Winnie turned to the executive officer and said:

"Date this rate back as far as you can. He'll need the extra money to buy his new uniforms."

"Aye aye, sir," the executive responded.

"That's about all, Delton," Winnie said. "How does it feel to be a chief?"

Buck was scratching the back of his neck.

"I don't know, sir," he grinned. "But I think, sir, that I feel about the way you will, when you get the news that you're a rear-admiral."

PIRATE GOLD

by Sherman Ripley

DEEP I lie beneath the sand,
Pirate gold!
Stripped from galleons that sleep
Where the shark and seaweed creep,
Now I rest on solid land;
Now my story all is told,
Pirate gold!

Bloody fingers counted me,
Pirate gold!
Still the hungry fingers thrust
Down among my gleaming dust—
Groping fingers of a tree,
Fingers clutching as of old
Pirate gold!

All for me they fought and bled,
Pirate gold!
Foot to foot they forced their way
Down the dripping deck that day;
Winners, losers, all are dead;
Here I lie deserted, cold—
Pirate gold!

The Watch on the Wine

by Charles Tenney Jackson

Author of "Sentimint," "The Sign of the Oolah," etc.

THE bootlegger's boots, sticking out between two cotton bales in the dim light of his warehouse, first attracted the attention of Colonel T. Sambola Tunk.

He pointed his gold-headed cane at them slightly. Deacon Gilfish nodded, hooked his spectacles higher on his nose and bent closer on inspection. Hobnailed and shiny, these boots, protruding out of the cotton bales, had a human suggestion that they were full of feet. Colonel Tunk touched one and then smelled of the ferule of his cane. Deacon Gilfish confirmed his theory with another knowing nod. He, also, smelled of Colonel Tunk's stick.

"How come, seh, I discover a total stranger stuck headfirst into my cotton stack at nine o'clock of a fine fall mornin'?"

"Chances are," mused Mr. Gilfish, "he ain't a total stranger. Chances are he was tryin' to leave a pint o' popskull for you in your hidin'-up hole, and got stuck. These here boots got corn mash on 'em. So the man in 'em must have been somewhere's trompin' on somebody's tumpin' board. It smells like stuff out o' Bat Easly's old converted turpentine still."

"It makes me think of Old Man Sawtell's tumpin's, seh. Mr. Gilfish, kindly extricate this person, seh. Sheriff Jim Peters might come along my river bottoms road any moment; and these mysterious boots have rushed in where a constitutional angel would fear to tread. Nothin' but corn liquor, seh, can account for his dilemma."

"Sure smells like Bat's second-run popskull," commented Mr. Gilfish as he laid hold of a cotton bale hook. "This pore pilgrim takes one snifter and then jumps into your cotton to bark at the boll weevils. He ain't clean dead either, for he wiggled."

Mr. Gilfish pushed the bales aside. First came some denim-clad legs; then a hickory shirt with one gallus hooked by a shingle nail; and then the head of the man of mystery, bound about with an ample gag of Colonel Tunk's short staple cotton.

When Mr. Gilfish dragged him out the mysterious one slumped down on the floor and moaned. Cotton stuck to his grizzled whiskers, his clothes and boots. His eyes glared out of his bindings. He looked like a last year's Santa Claus just dug out of some junk shop basement.

"Hillbilly hootch," asserted Mr. Gilfish. "And gagged and hog-tied with balin' wire. The whole business is unconstitutional, durned if it ain't. I told you it smelled like Bat Easly's stuff."

"That mash, seh, came off'n Sourwood Creek, where the Sawtell boys labor to assuage the thirst of such pilgrims travelin' the arid sands as can drink liquor two days old—aged in tin. Remove the bonds, seh."

Mr. Gilfish freed the mysterious stranger. He sat up, spat cotton out of his mouth, took a chew of tobacco and moaned again.

"Hijacked!" he said feebly. "They jumped me, they did. Got my gasboat, they did. Got my eggs, they did. Mornin', Colonel!"

Colonel Tunk saw, now, the pained, peeved and cotton-festooned face of Pink Sourds, one of the most prominent and

promising bootleggers of Mississippi City, Mississippi.

"Eggs, seh?"

"Yes, seh—eggs. I gone in the country produce business."

Deacon Gilfish looked him over and licked his nether lip. A pint of eggs, now, this morning—he looked at Colonel Tunk and Colonel Tunk looked at Pink Sourds who was picking a dried boll weevil cocoon out of his ear. Not an egg gurgled as Mr. Sourds shook his denim overalls.

"How many eggs, seh, was you transportin' in a legal, lawful manner in no way controvertin' intra-state commerce and the Volstead act, Mr. Sourds?"

"Well, I had one legal layer of eggs," said Mr. Sourds. "There was six cases stacked in the cabin, all labeled and consigned. The top case had the layer of eggs, and goin' under the county bridge where Jim Peters' deputies hang out, anybody could look down in the stern o' my gasboat and see it's eggs. Them old egg cases got busted yelks stickin' on 'em. Under the top layer o' eggs in the top crate, o' course—well, you might say—speakin' to Colonel Tunk and Deacon Gilfish——"

"The eggs is in demijohns, mebbe?" pursued Mr. Gilfish.

"Two-gallon oil cans," corrected Mr. Sourd. "Corn cob corks. Four cans to a case. They fit easy and tight. Except for my general reputation it'd fool a hijacker or a ring-tailed coon."

"And somebody jumped you when you put in my back landin'," mused Colonel Tunk. "Reckon, seh, it's too late for legal advice."

"Colonel, I'd landed you a gallon, but the minute I run into your wharf they jumped me. I was out o' gas, havin' a leaky tank. Thought mebbe I'd get some over in the edge o' town. Well, sir, the minute I got on the landin' they busted me on the head. The two of 'em climbs on my boat and tries to run her off. When they found there was no gas they come after me again. Tied me up and gagged me. Lugged me in your shed and stuck me in the cotton. Then I reckon they goes off to get some gas."

Mr. Gilfish looked up quickly. So did Colonel Tunk. A hijacker who hijacks a bootlegger is one segment of the circle. Colonel Tunk and Deacon Gilfish might complete it. No man can trust no man.

"Well, say!" put in Mr. Gilfish hurriedly, "the engine bein' dead, mebbe these ravenin' scoundrels didn't get away with it. If this cargo of eggs from up Sourwood Creek is still tied up to Colonel Tunk's plantation landin', why this calls for legal adjustment, don't it, Colonel?"

Colonel Tunk tightened his string tie and cleared his throat. Mr. Sourds clawed some cotton off his chin. It being a hard, bitter world in which a bootlegger must leg it, and the thirst of a Tunk of Mississippi City being what it had been for five generations, Mr. Sourds reflected without heat or passion.

In the shed door stood Mr. Gilfish's two possum dogs, and Mr. Sourds thought again, that if these murdering hijackers had failed to get his boat they certainly would cache his eggs somewhere in Colonel Tunk's river bottom woods.

NOW Deacon Gilfish's possum hounds had a certain after-midnight reputation about the countryside. They roamed far and free, and it was whispered that many a possum they had treed had turned out to be a humble colored citizen making the midnight tour on foot from Sourwood Creek to Mississippi City with a pants-leg package which had been meant for the superior white race's edification.

Good folk had been known to complain bitterly to each other that Deacon Gilfish lay awake nights listening for the distant yap and clamor of his canines. It was alleged these hounds bayed in different keys so that Mr. Gilfish knew at once whether they had found possum or popskull.

Mr. Sourds now reflected that a dog which would tree a bootlegger would tree a hijacker. Thirty gallons of eggs from Sourwood Creek, aged in tin—is something to lose at one whack.

"Well, gents," said Mr. Sourds, suddenly businesslike, "sayin' we trail down these ——, how many eggs does it cost me?"

"Eggs is worth what you can get, seh," said Colonel Tunk darkly.

"This stuff," retorted Mr. Sourds dismally, "ain't what a gentleman like Colonel Tunk'd ought to drink. They ain't been a good pot o' corn run off up Sourwood since Old Man Sawtell was took with the measles.

"The Sawtell boys use a worm which is a

hunk o' lead pipe stole off the Maddox House laundry. The old woman tumps the barrel with a poke they use to spread hawgs with at hawg-killin' time. Why, their durn old still is a chicken roost half the time——"

"Mr. Sourds," said Mr. Gilfish, "you ain't the first rum runner I heard knock his own stuff when he gets in a fix. This calls for legal aid, advice and comfort. It's a plain case o' nux vomica non-disputandum, ain't it, Colonel?"

"Until we find out whether these scoundrels got away with Mr. Sourd's eggs, the discussion is purely academic, seh. Come on, gentlemen. The Baptist sunday school picnic boat'll be passin' at ten o'clock, and Sheriff Jim Peters' deputies will be watchin' on the county bridge, as usual, to see who goes up and down in the egg business."

"One little jug wouldn't do no harm," concluded Deacon Gilfish, and he dug one out from under a pile of gunnysacks. Uprose then his two possum dogs with intelligent interest. Many a possum they had seen poured in that jug, and neither hide nor hair ever came out again from the deacon's back door once the jug got in.

Well, no dog can trust no man. No hen can trust no egg-crate label. Corn, these days, doesn't know whether it'll wind up in a chiropodist's clinic or a congressional investigation. Since Professor Izzy Einstein discovered that every straight thing in the universe is crooked, Newton's apple was probably more than one half of one per cent. hard cider when it hit the ground, and the law of gravitation, therefore, unconstitutional.

"Come on, seh," put in Colonel Tunk. "If, by any chance, your gasboat hasn't been robbed it must get off my landin'. With the Baptists liable to picnic anywhere about, this is no place for eggs. And Peters and Preacher Dick Tuttle and Miss Mattie Millard bein' suspicious in general of gasboats back of my plantation."

"They wouldn't believe I peddled eggs if I busted 'em and showed 'em chickens inside," grunted Mr. Sourds dismally.

Down through the muscadine jungle and the chinkapin brush went the trio with the possum hounds dutifully pointing in the rear at Deacon Gilfish's possum jug.

Mr. Sourds led the investigation. Fifteen feet from the low bank where the road ended on Colonel Tunk's plank landing, he stopped. Two strangers were beyond, down the shore from a thirty-foot cabin launch which was moored to the posts. One carried a shotgun. The other a five-gallon gasoline can. But the two hijackers merely gaped at the gasboat and then at the avenging party. Mr. Sourds gaped back at them speechlessly.

"Ain't got away with an egg!" yelled Mr. Gilfish joyously.

The shotgun guard waved his gun doggedly. Colonel Tunk advanced boldly as one who knew both the constitution and the law of the jungle where men were men if they could get away with it.

"Are these, seh, Mr. Sourds, the miscreants who laid piratical hands upon your egg boat, in the following manner: To wit——"

"Wait," said Mr. Sourds. "I hate to identify a man who packs a shotgun. With the sheriff on the bridge down there, I name no one who might have interfered with the egg business. Whatever my personal opinion o' hijackers might be, with a Baptist picnic liable to come along and listen to any discussion, I raise no rookus."

The bandit with the shotgun sat down on the gasoline can and spat accurately at the largest knot hole in Colonel Tunk's two-plank wharf.

"That sounds reasonable," said the other hijacker, "I see only one thing that stops this from bein' a partnership founded on love and brotherly feelin'."

"Who said so?" queried Mr. Sourds. "I ain't gone so far yet. I'm willin' to buy the gas you lugged from town and thank you two gents even if you did wander into sin and error."

"Don't thank us," retorted the shotgun man. "We'd been gone with your boat before Jim Peter's deputies was out o' bed if it hadn't been for the polecat."

"Polecat?" murmured Mr. Sourds. "How come a polecat?"

"Well, this polecat must have been out early meanderin' after cutworms. We dassen't shoot so we waited for it to go home."

"Polecat!" gasped Mr. Gilfish. He turned to Colonel Tunk.

The leading legal light of Mississippi City, Mississippi, being taller than the others and closer to the abandoned launch, peered cautiously in the open after-door of the boarded-up cabin. Slowly Colonel Tunk backed away into the chinkapin brush, and motioned his auditors after him.

"I see him, gentlemen. Curled up on Mr. Sourds' raincoat on top the stack of egg crates. Now, I would advise no man how to adjudicate a polecat sittin' on top a load of corn liquor. A false step now, and this gasboat couldn't go anywhere without attractin' undue attention."

"That's what I told Hank when he wanted to shoot it," said the first hijacker. "He's got to be induced off this gasboat by peaceable means. Now you know a skunk is drawed anywhere by eggs. He crawls on Pink's cargo thinkin' it's eggs. He'll spend all day tryin' to hook an egg up through them crate slats."

Mr. Gilfish tiptoed around where he got a look. There was the black and white polecat, all right, his bushy tail over his shoulder, and even his eyes visible in the murky light in the cabin. Deacon Gilfish pulled his hound dogs farther away down the bank.

The possum dogs sniffed the air once and sat down by Mr. Gilfish's jug. A high class possum hound knows that his pedigree calls for just possums—not polecats.

"Well, here we be," sighed Mr. Gilfish. "Thirty gallons of corn liquor fifteen yards away, and no more chance of a jigger than a rabbit. The Baptists comin' and all. What you goin' to do now, Colonel?"

Colonel Tunk parted his coat tails and stared down in the mud by his bayou landing. There had been a right smart early rain that morning and in the mud was a mark. It might have been a footprint, but if so no polecat made it. Neither had the boots of a bootlegger. Colonel Tunk was about to make a profound remark about this mysterious trail when one of the possum dogs stepped on it.

Colonel Tunk sighed and looked up the bayou. An asthmatic whistle had sounded jerkily up around the bend by the town landing. In no time now young Preacher Dick Tuttle and Miss Millard of the Anti-Bootleggers' League would chaperon the Sunday school picnic down this way, and everybody from Sourwood Creek to the camp meeting grounds knew Mr. Pink Sourds' gasboat.

THE time called for action, and there was this polecat sitting on the crate with a hope, trust and hankering that it was a case of eggs. Worse still, down at the County Bridge below, watched Jim Peters, the wreckinest sheriff that ever put kinks in a copper coil.

"It ain't my hootch," volunteered one of the hijackers, "and it ain't my skunk, but if you gents'd take my advice you'd snake this boat off in the big timber and give this skunk a chance to get tired and go home. If it finds it can't claw an egg out o' that crate it may quit."

"That's so," put in Mr. Gilfish. "And if it gets vexed why we're all blowed up. These corn cob corks in Pink's tin cans ain't polecat proof. A skunk fight in that cabin and where do we get off? Far as a drink is concerned, Colonel, we're up skunk creek——"

Again the glad shriek of the picnic boat's whistle. Colonel Tunk even heard the young folks' voices, and caught the flicker of a summer gown or two up the bayou road. He mopped his brow and considered. If only one of the party with him, one with a weak mind and a strong stomach could go on Pink's launch and get that motor going? But yet—no! This would unduly agitate the skunk.

The two hijackers sat down and showed their ease. They stated freely that nobody had anything on them. It wasn't their popskull. It wasn't their polecat. It wasn't their picnic coming.

Even now the glad whoops of the Sunday school picnic sounded nearer. Cap'n Jed Yoakum's old flap-paddle sidewheeler was coming around the bend with the Baptist hosts.

Colonel Tunk mopped his head again hurriedly.

"Gentlemen, are you with me? A stratagem, gentlemen, which, as fellow pilgrims trottin' the arid wastes, may discomfit the Philistines."

"Name it fast," muttered Mr. Sourds. "Anything in reason. I expect to split, gentlemen. A polecat and a picnic, both unexpected, you might say, and Jim Peters down on the bridge, and no man can say I was stingy with my eggs. Quick——"

"Seh, cast off your moorin' lines. By bein' reasonably quiet we can all crowd on the foredeck, gentlemen. The polecat bein' aft, and the front door closed, very likely we can drift out in midstream. Helpless seh—ready for aid from even a church picnic——"

"You mean they give us a tow?" gasped Mr. Gilfish.

"Under the bridge, seh. Sheriff Peters, seein' Mr. Sourds' gasboat chaperoned by the Rev. Dick Tuttle and Miss Millard of the Anti-Bootleggers' League, can in no way suspect us."

"It can't be did!" whispered Mr. Gilfish.

"With a skunk on board?" protested Mr. Sourds.

"Headed for a Sunday school picnic?" put in Hank, the hijacker.

"The polecat, seh, saves us in the end. I shall inform Preacher Dick Tuttle that Mr. Sourds, bein' in the country produce business and broke down, will cheerfully donate a case of eggs to the picnic in return for a tow down past the camp meetin' landin'.

"We can even intimate, seh, that Deacon Gilfish, long a backslider from the church, has repented; and further that these two gentlemen from Calloway County have evinced a new interest in the higher life. All this, seh—until we are a mile below Mr. Peters' patrol station on the bridge."

"And then what?" gasped Mr. Gilfish excitedly.

"Yes, seh, we promise them eggs for an egg-rollin'—and then what?" said Mr. Sourds, struggling with a wisp of hope.

"Throwed the sheriff off the trail, but we still got the durn skunk," objected Hank. "Yes, seh, Colonel, then what?"

"Once safe around the camp meetin' bend from Mr. Peters' curiosity, gentlemen, and we proclaim to the Baptists that we have been boarded by a polecat. We discover this objectionable animal, seh, in the gasboat cabin. Nobody can explain it, naturally, but it stands to reason the Sunday school will freely part company with us, seh, and we can drift on and land somewhere to continue discussin' ways and means to mollify this polecat."

"Doggone!" yelled Mr. Gilfish. "Who'd thought it? Thirty gallons of liquor, and fifty-fifty——"

"Who said so?" grunted Pink Sourds.

"Three ways for a split," put in Hank. "Otherwise Bill and me might wander around and meet a deputy. Then where's your gasboat? Fitchered, by Swanny!"

Pink slid over on the narrow foredeck of his launch. The way of a bootlegger is hard and full of stickups. He made no sound when the others followed him. Mr. Gilfish cautiously closed the wheelhouse door. Engineroom and cargo-hold were all one in Mr. Sourds' gasboat, and there the polecat presided. Nobody cared to go aft. On the wharf Deacon Gilfish's dogs sat still watching his possum jug intelligently but mysteriously.

So it was amid-stream that Captain Yoakum slowed down his two-deck, side-paddle, little steamboat at Colonel Tunk's hail. Cheers and yells drowned Colonel Tunk's bow to Miss Mattie, and plea to Rev. Mr. Tuttle. The merrymakers only got a word here and there.

"—Egg business, seh. Mr. Pink Sourds of Sourwood Creek, seh, and now in the country produce trade—motor trouble, seh——"

"Hi!" yelled Preacher Dick cheerfully. "Get a line to Colonel Tunk! Sure—tow you far as you want! Come to our picnic, boys!"

One of the hijackers grabbed the towline which came rattling over from the picnic boat. As he made it fast he remarked to his fellow bandit that so far nobody had nothing on him. Not even the polecat.

All the young Baptists began to yell and cheer over the rail when they saw Colonel Tunk stagger slightly as the launch yawed around in the wake of the overloaded little steamboat. The bow of the launch rode deep with the five pilgrims there, but nobody offered to go aft. The after door to the stern deck was open, and one thing a polecat relishes is privacy.

"Any fuss now'd spoil my eggs for the general trade," observed Mr. Sourds. "I wouldn't think o' bein' rescued by a Baptist Sunday school if Colonel Tunk wasn't along. Old Peters' deputies, watchin' on the county bridge, can't reasonably be suspicious of eggs that is towed by a Baptist picnic and guardeened by Colonel Tunk. When we get past town we can cut loose and back into the bank and induce this skunk ashore mebbe."

Even the two hijacking strangers from Calloway County recognized that. Colonel Tunk and the skunk lent a certain air of reserve to the party. Nobody talked back to the boatload of picnickers. Even when the Baptist boat wheezed under the bridge, and Sheriff Jim Peters, himself, yelled down at Preacher Dick Tuttle, the quintet looked at Colonel Tunk and waited. Jim Peters saw them next and renewed his greetings.

"Well, if there ain't old Popskull Pink headin' for Sunday school! Well, well—

well!" roared Mr. Peters. "Got religion, seh?"

"No, seh—eggs," responded Colonel Tunk. "Bought a few cases of eggs, seh, and the young folks are goin' to have an old-fashioned egg-rollin'. Good day, seh——"

"Egg-rollin'!" whooped the Sunday school class clamoring along the rail to cheer Sheriff Peters on the bridge, and Colonel Tunk on the gasboat astern. Miss Mattie Millard waved her handkerchief enthusiastically.

"Easter's the only time I ever heard for an egg-rollin'," mused Preacher Dick Tuttle. "Well, all right. We can boil 'em in the camp furnace on the meetin' grounds. But, I declare—it's mighty curious! Colonel Tunk and Deacon Gilfish donatin' eggs to our picnic? Still, we saw egg cases on that boat this mornin' when it rained, didn't we, Miss Mattie?"

"Hush," she whispered. "We did, but——"

Another Sunday school yell drowned what Miss Mattie might have added. The fleet had got past the bridge now. Sheriff Jim Peters looked at Kelly, his chief rum-hound deputy, and then at the county speedboat rocking below the abutments. There was no good reason why a modest egg business might not be born to hatch unseen under the roof of Mr. Pink Sourds' launch, and yet the presence of Colonel T. Sambola Tunk did not suggest eggs as much as it did nog.

"Now the Colonel luggin' Pink Sourds to a picnic is something I never expected to see in all my born days," complained Deputy Kelly. "I wouldn't believe it if——"

Then Mr. Kelly stopped. His mouth opened, his jaw hung. He stared after the retreating gasboat towed in the wake of the Sunday school craft. Some picnicker had got hold of Cap'n Yoakum's whistle cord, and a joyous shriek sounded over the waters. Still Mr. Kelly stared.

"Sufferin' sin—" he finally yelled. "What do you think I saw! Inside that gasboat on top a box, goin' to that picnic?"

"The county pays you to see only one thing, Mr. Kelly."

"No, sir, Sheriff! Them fellers can get by with their eggs, but I saw a skunk! Must have clum' aboard when they wasn't noticin'. Why, say—a polecat'll bust up any picnic you ever see!"

"Polecat?" mused Jim Peters. "Well, if Pink Sourds has quit bootleggin' and got religion I hate to have a durn skunk interfere. Start that old kicker, Kelly, and we'll go give 'em warnin'. I reckon it's the eggs drawed the polecat. Well, sir, I withdraw my doubts if they got a polecat. No polecat would come sniffin' after hillbilly corn liquor. But we got to rescue them picnic folks, Mr. Kelly."

Off the bridge and down to the county speedboat hurried the two vigilantes. The county speedboat was brassy and sassy. Every one in Mississippi City loved to see it burn up county gas and churn up bayou mud. The taxpayers loved to see it scoot and the bootleggers loved to see it stuck. When it ran aground the bayou egg business boomed, and when it got off, folks up Sourwood Creek traded overland by midnight flivvers.

THE little picnic steamboat had wheezed and tootled around the camp meetin' bend by the time the rescuers had got up full speed. Deputy Kelly held the wheel and stared ahead.

"Smell anything?" murmured Sheriff Peters.

"Gas," answered Kelly. "This skunk is savin' its strength. But when they land that outfit—say, look out!"

"Wonder if that skunk knows what sort of company he's travelin' with? Wonder if Colonel Tunk knows about the skunk?" mused Mr. Peters. "His pose on that gasboat didn't seem natural."

"Well, this skunk was natural. Curled up on the egg crates. I almost seen his eyes. He'd ruin any picnic."

"Well, we'll do our duty. But there's nothin' in the Volstead act about raidin' a skunk. It might be constitutional, but nothin'd make it popular. If every rum craft'd carry a skunk I'd vote to put the twelve mile limit out to fifty and let the health department watch 'em. What was this skunk doin' when you looked down in that bootleggin' boat, Kelly?"

"Sittin' pretty. Satisfied like any skunk is when he sees eggs. There's the Baptists landin' at the Camp meetin' wharf."

Sheriff Peters looked darkly at the group on the foredeck of the cabin launch as the county speed demon closed in. He remarked again that Colonel T. Sambola Tunk didn't look natural. Mr. Gilfish had a constrained attitude. Mr. Pink Sourds

seemed to brood about his eggs. The two total strangers from Calloway County swung their legs over the bow and watched aft. As Hank said, this was what a hijacker got for associating with a bootlegger.

The sheriff's speed demon scooted close in where Colonel Tunk was explaining to Rev. Mr. Tuttle on the steamboat about his party's need of retirement and privacy. Deacon Gilfish had grabbed Colonel Tunk's leg and shook it as he crouched low on the deck behind the wheelhouse.

"Now you see what this business gets us?" moaned Mr. Gilfish. "Jim Peters sniffin' in! You explain, Colonel, that I been possum huntin'. If I had my dogs I could prove it. But a man might as well be goggle-eyed as found on Pink's gasboat."

Colonel Tunk moistened a dry lip. The race is not always to the spiffed or the bottle to the strong. But no possum dog could serve as an alibi for a Tunk of Mississippi City, Mississippi.

Mr. Pink Sourds gazed hopelessly at him. The two hijackers took a chew apiece. They'd swear to the truth; as far as they knew this broken-down motor boat had nothing but eggs but what good would that do? You could tell it to the judge, but——

"This here," murmured Bill, "is what comes o' associatin' with a bootlegger. We ought to laid off this job when we discovered the skunk. Then along comes this Colonel Tunk and he horns in on the split. One look at this old party, and what chance did we have for a case o' eggs? Why, say, if Rum Row ever see that old fish hove in sight with his thirst it'd back off past sunrise!"

The speed demon sped closer. Deputy Kelly stood up and yelled. The picnic boat was touching the wharf, and a slack towline sank between its paddle-guard and the cabin launch.

The speedboat pirouetted around friskily. Kelly began to bawl again across the placid bayou water.

"Say, Preacher Dick, you be careful! You got a skunk——"

"Tunk?" shouted Dick Tuttle cheerfully. "Sure, he's on the other boat. He brought the eggs——"

"Skunk!" howled the officer and pointed aft.

One hundred and six Baptists gazed after him. Colonel Tunk tottered when the launch drifted in and rubbed the wharf beyond the picnic boat. The hijacking bootleggers all looked up at him. Deacon Gilfish got behind his alpaca coat.

That's what one gets for being a leading citizen and member of the bar. In any public crisis leading citizens must lead. The quartet got behind his coat tails as far as they could and pushed him forward to address the multitude.

Colonel Tunk moistened his dry lips. He looked aft where the skunk forbade a getaway down through the launch cabin, and forward where the picnic hemmed him in.

"You tell 'em," whispered Deacon Gilfish. "Me—I was possum huntin'——"

"As far as me and Bill know," urged the first hijacker, "it's eggs. Kunnel, you can swear to that—all me and Bill know is what Pink Sourds said; and he said eggs."

They heard a groan and a sobby sort of splash somewhere. All the Baptists began to yell. Mr. Sourds had slid quietly overboard into the mud of Bayou Goula and was gobbing his way to the woods. It was a good plan for a mudder. The sheriff's boat on the other side couldn't see this departure. But Peters and Kelly heard the uproar.

"That skunk is comin' forward, mebbe, to climb on the picnic boat. Why don't them fellers on the launch protect the wimen and children?"

"Hey—skunk!" yelled Deputy Kelly.

"Pop him," said Sheriff Peters.

Kelly aimed at the cabin. When his pistol cracked, more cheers.

Another uproar from the picnickers. Bill, the hijacker, had followed Pink, the bootlegger. His head plowed along in the water hyacinths inshore to the woods. His friend ducked past Colonel Tunk's knees and plopped down to more cheers from the boat ahead. He laid his shotgun along the deck and whispered.

"Well, old party, if that polecat comes hootin' up through the engine room—shoot. It ain't a matter now o' savin' eggs, but legs from the chain gang. I got business somewheres."

"I told you," murmured the preacher, looking down from the steamboat's deck, "this didn't look natural. Ah, here comes Mr. Gilfish trying to wiggle into our Sunday school class!"

Colonel Tunk stood on a deck whence all but he had fled. The speed demon edged

cautiously in, and Sheriff Peters laid a hand on the wharf. The Baptist hosts cheered him impartially as they had the three mudders off the egg boat.

"Mornin', Preacher Dick! Didn't know, I reckon, you was towin' a skunk? In this here launch cabin. Kelly seen it."

"I popped him clean dead—" boasted Kelly. "Right on Pink's raincoat on top that pile o'crates. He didn't even shake a leg. Saved every durn egg for 'em, that's what I done."

Nobly the Baptist picnickers cheered this feat. The speedboat edged alongside, and Mr. Kelly climbed over. He looked down in the cabin cautiously. He stuck his head in and pulled it out.

"Skunk!" he yelled victoriously.

"Polecat, seh!" retorted Colonel Tunk, chivalrous to the last.

He heard a sob from Miss Mattie. When he turned, young Preacher Dick Tuttle was shielding her with his good right arm from the crowding picnickers along the rail. Pale and confused, Miss Mattie listened to Dick Tuttle's comforting words aside.

Everyone else watched the after door of the gasboat into which Deputy Kelly had disappeared. Then he stuck his head out again and waved a black and white object. It had teeth and eyes and a tail and everything. It had, in fact, more than a good polecat was entitled to. Deputy Kelly held it up.

"This here polecat's been wronged long before I ever blowed a hole in him," announced Mr. Kelly." His stummick is silk-lined and he smells like drug sto' stuff. How come, now?"

"Oh, heavens!" whispered Miss Mattie Millard close to young Preacher Tuttle's ear. "Dick, don't you ever say it was mine! How did I know that was a bootlegger's boat where we stopped this mornin' to get out of the rain while we waited for the picnic?"

"Left your summer fur collar there, did you?" whispered Preacher Dick. "Well, of course I won't admit it—but what does a woman want to wear skunk fur for, anyhow?"

From the camp meeting wharf Colonel Tunk was looking at the two on the steamboat deck. The picnickers were cheering again. First for Deputy Kelly, and then the polecat.

Its death stare was wonderful, but Mr. Kelly was running a finger up and down the lining of what should have been its stomach. Not an egg, not even an identification mark.

Sheriff Peters was dumping crates off the stack in the gasboat's cabin and smelling of corks after he knocked the slats off a lower one. He came out and gazed at the wooded shore. Even the glad young picnickers streaming up under the camp meeting oaks failed to lighten the cynic eye which he cast upon Colonel T. Sambola Tunk.

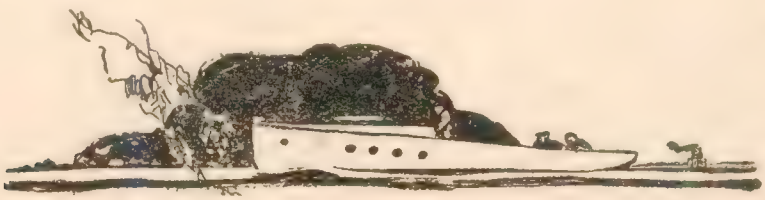
Colonel Tunk was watching Miss Mattie Millard. Young Preacher Tuttle looked meaningfully down at Colonel Tunk. Certainly the little footprint Colonel Tunk had discovered this morning in the mud by his landing was never made by a lady bootlegger's boots. But even a bootlegger's abandoned boat would do for two young people seeking shelter from a shower.

So Colonel Tunk said nothing to some pointed questions that Sheriff Peters put to him.

"Of course, Colonel, you thought it was eggs. Some eggs'll fool anybody. But if you'd give an old-fashioned egg-rollin' with eggs off this boat this picnic'd broke up the church. And this skunk, now. A good man might get fooled by a good skunk——"

"Polecat, seh—" repeated Colonel Tunk —"a lady being present."

"All right," murmured Sheriff Peters, "call it billygoat if you want. But I wonder what the wimmen are wearin' outside the twelve-mile limit?"



OM

A Six-Part Story —Conclusion

by Talbot Mundy

Author of "Mohamed's Tooth," "The Nine Unknown," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

WHEN Cottswold Ommony, forester in the Civil Service of India, drifted into the die-hard club at Delhi the members straightway began to gossip about him. They recalled that Jack Terry, the M. D., married Ommony's younger sister Elsa twenty years before; that an American pork packer named Marmaduke persuaded Terry to become medico at the Buddhist mission which Marmaduke had established at Tilgaun; that Ommony was co-trustee with a red-headed American spinster named Hannah Sanburn who was head of the mission; and with a Tibetan Ringding Gelong Lama whom Ommony had never seen; that his enemy, Jenkins, had been appointed head of the forestry department and that Ommony had resigned.

As for Ommony, he said nothing; but pretty soon he got up and went to see his friend, John McGregor, his giant Irish wolf-hound Diana at heel. McGregor was head of the Secret Service. Their conversation developed interestingly. Jenkins had had Elsa hypnotized by the black-art swine, Kananda Pal, robbed her of her mind and used her mental maladjustment as an excuse to break the engagement between them. Terry married her to save her and took her to a sacred place in the upper Abor country to have her cured. There the "Masters" live; there also is a sacred stone with magic properties. Terry and Elsa disappeared. That was twenty years ago.

McGregor also told Ommony that Miss Sanburn's adopted daughter had been robbed of a piece of crystal jade, the thief being murdered and the jade, as well as the adopted daughter, disappearing. Tin Lal, a Secret Service operative, recovered the jade and tried to sell it to Chutter Chand, the jeweler. Through Chutter Chand's agency McGregor recovered the jade and since then had been importuned by a mysterious somebody to give it up. He thought that the jade might have something to do with the disappearance of the Terrys.

Suddenly hopeful of rescuing his sister, Ommony determined to inspect the Buddhist mission at Tilgaun as a pretext, then slip away on the desperate chance of penetrating the perilous unexplored upper Abor country, whence no stranger had ever returned.

Before starting he took the jade to his friend Chutter Chand, the jeweler. Chutter Chand said that in his opinion the jade had been broken off from a much larger piece and sensitized in very ancient times by a prehistoric race of superscientists, with the result that the stone reflects the whole of the holder's thought and character from the very day he was born. The jeweler added that he thought the "Masters" of the upper Abor guarded the forgotten secrets of the superscientists with the idea of letting them out a little at a time as the world was prepared to receive them. He was in abject terror, for a mysterious visitor had threatened him with death if he did not return the stone.

Just then an old Tibetan lama entered with his young *chela* or disciple in quest of the jade. He didn't get it. Ommony sent his wolf-hound Diana to trail them to their quarters when they left and himself made friends with the Hillman whom they had posted to shadow him. The Hillman said that is name was Dawa Tsering and that he came from Spiti, where they practise polyandry. The old lama, he said, was Tsiang Samdup, a name which startled Ommony. The disciple was Samding; "some call him San-fun-ho." Then he suddenly waxed uncommunicative and disappeared.

The dog Diana returned and led Ommony to the lama's hiding-place, where Dawa Tsering tried to knife him in the dark. Diana bit the Hillman in the neck; Ommony took the knife away from him, and the Hillman cursed the lamas.

"They told me I could come to no harm if I obeyed them and said my prayers," he added. "Their magic is useless. Give me my knife and I will go back to the Hills."

Ommony gave Dawa Tsering the address of Mrs. Cornock-Campbell, where he was to be a guest at dinner, and told the Hillman to report there between ten and eleven that night, when the knife would be returned. Then he drove to McGregor's office, wrapped up the jade, addressed the package to Miss Sanburn at Tilgaun and entrusted it to

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McGregor's most trusted operative, the Eurasian, Aaron Macaulay, for delivery.

When Dawa Tsering showed up for his knife he told them that the jade had been found on a man from Abor, who had come to the Tilgaun mission for medical treatment and had died there. The stone was stolen from Miss Sanburn by a mission girl, whom the Secret Service operative Tin Lal had subsequently murdered. Tsiang Samdup had promised Dawa Tsering a great reward for recovering it. During their stay in Delhi Dawa Tsering noticed that the lama was visited a good deal by "actor people."

Just then a letter was shoved under the door, and the messenger disappeared before any one could see who he was.

THE letter, which was signed by Tsiang Samdup, referred vaguely to the "Middle Way" and asked Ommony to take the jade to Tilgaun, "which is one stage of the journey to the place whence it came."

Ommony, provoked at Tsiang Samdup because the lama would not take Ommony into his confidence, determined not to play into the other's hands by preceding him to Tilgaun, but to trail him there, thus finding out what the other was up to on the road. Also Ommony made up his mind to find that "Middle Way," and find it without the aid of the Secret Service. If the latter took a hand, Ommony well knew the Way would be closed to him. He knew of course that the phrase as the lama used it might refer to its religious significance but most likely—indeed almost surely—meant an actual secret trail through India.

He bullied Dawa Tsering into leaving the lama's service and entering his own; then, accompanied by the Hillman and Diana, he departed to visit Benjamin the Jew, a merchant and money lender to whom he had once done a very great favor. Moved by gratitude, the merchant told him much. He learned first, that the lama "for certain reasons" was planning to take a troupe of actors north.

Then too he wormed it out of Benjamin that for the past fifteen years or more the latter had been Tsiang Samdup's Delhi agent. The lama, it seems, always paid his bills in small bars of solid gold.

Finally after an enormous emotional struggle Benjamin confessed under seal of utter confidence that Tsiang Samdup's traffic with him was largely concerned with smuggling friendless little European girls—seven had been smuggled already—up into the lamaist country and with buying supplies for them. From Delhi they went up by the "Middle Way."

Ommony was shocked—disgusted—and even more determined to see this thing through. Seeing the contempt in Ommony's manner, Benjamin offered to help him into the Abor country, where Ommony could see for himself that neither Benjamin nor the lama had done anything but good for the little girls. This could easily be accomplished, because Maitraya, the leader of the lama's troupe of actors, was in Benjamin's debt. So Ommony disguised himself as a Bhat-Brahman—a caste of Brahman so high that it was beyond the reach of caste—and as such was introduced to Maitraya, under the name of Gupta Rao. Under protest Maitraya took "Gupta Rao" into his troupe as leading actor.

This business being arranged, the two actors drove off to meet the lama and his *chela*, who were attending the birthday party of Vasantasena, a courtezan who wielded more power secretly than a dozen maharajas did openly. There Ommony was surprized to learn that indirectly the piece of jade had passed from Aaron Macaulay's hands into those of Vasantasena. What a marvelous spy system the lama controlled! he reflected.

Vasantasena held out the jade temptingly.

"Give me your *chela* in exchange," she coaxed.

"No," replied the *chela* in a voice like a golden gong.

Vasantasena's eyes flashed, and her mood changed into savagery like a stirred snake's. She flung the stone at the lama straight and hard. He secreted it in his bosom imperturbably.

"Go," she ordered hoarsely. "You—and you—and you, dogs of actors!"

Unhurriedly the four left and entered a strange carriage at the gate, with the servants of Vasantasena pursuing them. But the pursuit was not in order to do them harm, but to beseech forgiveness and to beg them to accept gifts from their mistress, that her sacrilegious action might not prove ill-omened. However, their gifts and cries were ignored, and in silence the four drove off.

THEY drove off to a Tibetan cloister and rehearsed the play, which proved somewhat akin to the European medieval morality play and apparently had been written by the lama with the idea of making the people vaguely dissatisfied with British rule. The *chela's* acting and delivery outshone that of Maitraya, who had been engaged as the star.

That evening a caravan of elephants and camels took the troupe, together with a number of unidentified women, from Delhi to a destination which the lama abstained from revealing. Ommony, Dawa Tsering and Diana were guests—or prisoners; it was hard to tell which.

When they came to a halt Ommony resolved upon a showdown. Bluntly he told Tsiang Samdup who he was and demanded that the lama talk too. For answer Tsiang Samdup led Ommony along a long screened passageway that echoed to the laughter of women and bade him look through a slit in a wooden panel down on to the floor below.

There Ommony was astonished to see a group of young women, some of them unmistakable Hindus, some Tibetan, and some, fourteen in all, which he could not place. Their faces and bearing were European, but they spoke Urdu with the other girls, and it occurred to Ommony that these must be the children Benjamin had kidnaped. Perfect poise and self-possession characterized them all. High and low caste they talked and laughed together until the *chela* went among them, bearing in his hands the fragment of crystal jade. In turn, they gazed into it almost reverently, and then at an order from the lama, they quickly left the room. The old man refused to satisfy Ommony's curiosity as to their identity.

Finding that Diana would obey her master's signals, the lama gave her a "speaking part" in the play, and made her rehearse with the troupe a little later in the day. When Ommony raised his finger Diana would open her mouth and the lama spoke her lines from behind a screen, where he stood to direct the actors.

The rehearsal lasted all the afternoon and on until the time for the performance to begin. Thanks to the lama's efforts and the *chela's* consummate skill as an actor the play aroused immense enthusiasm, but instead of staying to give another performance the troupe left the town at once with a speed that amounted to flight.

They halted shortly before dawn in a private park and when Ommony awoke he found that he had been left behind. Later a message was brought by a servant requesting him not to leave without orders. Then, while he waited, there came Sirdar Sirohe Singh of Tilgaun, a member of the Secret Service and, apparently, a friend of the lama's, who stayed close by, keeping watch over Ommony until nightfall when the troupe reappeared. No explanation was offered for this behaviour.

For two months they traveled across Northern India, never stopping in any one place more than one night, and not once was Ommony able to approach or speak with any of the mysterious girls.

At last they reached the great foothills and were received at a lamasery near Darjeling. After a short rest Ommony left the cell-like room he had been given and, at the end of a wind-swept hall, came to a gallery, overhanging a dim hall where incense-clouds floated. Here a service was in progress, and on the altar lay the fragment of crystal jade.

There, too, stood the *chela*, and Ommony, as he stared down at the scene, made an astonishing discovery: The *chela* was not a boy but a girl! Ommony could see the curve of her breasts.

He went back to his cell and later, when he went in search of the lama, found that the old man had gone. Ommony followed and at last reached Tilgaun where he met Hannah Sanburn, who told him that the *chela* was his niece—the daughter of his sister. Hannah Sanburn had been sworn to secrecy years gone-by by the lama.

Ommony's sister and her husband, Jack Terry, had found their way into the Abor Valley and had died of terrible injuries, but the lama had saved the child and reared her carefully.

Later Ommony, guided by the Sirdar Sirohe Singh set out on the last part of his journey to the Abor Valley. The way led to the very heart of the mountains and then through vast caverns, beneath the Brahmaputra River and then up and up along stone stairs carved around the wall of an enormous chamber. The sirdar was tireless but the strain told on Ommony and he fainted. When he revived he was lying out in the open again beneath a starlit sky.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LAMA'S HOME

In this sense we are our brothers' keepers: that if we injure them we are responsible. Therefore, our duty is, so vigilantly to control ourselves that we may injure none; and for this there is no substitute; all other duties take a lower place and are dependant on it.
—From the Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

WHEN Ommony recovered consciousness it was some time before he was sure he was not dreaming. There was no sense of stability. The universe appeared to sway beneath him and the sky, when he opened his eyes at last, swung like a compass-card. He closed his eyes, heard voices, and presently discovered he was on a stretcher being borne on men's heads. When he opened his eyes again the first thing he saw was Diana looking down at him from a rock. She barked when he moved his hand.

It was a very rough stretcher made of poles and hide. His feet were loosely tied to it and a rope was passed over his breast, but he could get his hands under the rope, and its purpose was explained when the stretcher became tilted at an acute angle and he rode for a while with his feet pointed at the sky. On either hand were sloping limestone cliffs and he was being carried up a dry watercourse between them.

He felt no impulse to ask questions, but was curious about his own condition. He when he was carried to an operating room. When the stretcher returned to the horizontal and he cautiously tested each muscle, he discovered that his leg-sinews were so stiff that he could hardly bear to move them. Then he remembered; every step of the climb up that Titanic stairway came back to him like a nightmare.

He craned his neck looking for the sirdar, but failed to discover him. He could not see the stretcher-bearers, but there were eight Abors walking behind, ready to relieve them—hairy, savage-looking men, possessed of that air of deliberate indifference that usually hides extreme fanaticism; their eyes were large, like those of deer, and the hair came close up to their cheek bones. They all had weapons; two were armed with bow and arrows; but no two weapons were alike, and no two were dressed exactly alike.

Presently the path began to follow the edge of a cliff five or six thousand feet above a river—undoubtedly, from its size, the Brahmaputra—that galloped and plunged among rocks in the bed of a valley on the left hand.

Incredible, enormous mountains leaned against the sky, but the valley lay golden and green in sunlight, patched with the vivid emerald of corn fields, dotted with grazing cattle, and with the dark-brown roofs of villages. It looked like an exceedingly rich valley, and well populated.

After a mile or two of gorgeous vista the

track turned to the right and passed between moss-covered ruins whose limestone blocks, weighing tons apiece, had turned to every imaginable hue of green, gray, brown and yellow. Blue and red flowers were growing in the crevices, and trees had forced themselves between tremendous paving stones that now lay tilted with their edges to the sky. Ommony untied the rope across his breast and sat up to observe the ruins, laying both hands on his thighs to ease their aching; and presently he gasped—forgot the agony.

The track passed between two monolithic columns more enormous than the grandest ones at Thebes, and emerged on the rim of a natural amphitheatre, whose terraced sides descended for about two thousand feet to where a torrent of green and white water rushed from a cave mouth and plunged into a fissure in the limestone opposite. The air was full of the noise of water and the song of birds, intoxicating with the scent of flowers and vivid with their color.

Every terrace was a wilderness of flowers and shade-trees, strewn with bowlders that broke up the regularity, and connected one with another by paths and bridges of natural limestone where streams gushed from the fern-draped rock and fell in cascades to the torrent in the midst. There was an atmosphere of sunlit peace.

Above the topmost terrace, occupying about a third of the circumference, were buildings in the Chinese style, whose roofs were carved with dragons and whose rear walls appeared to be built into the cliff, which rose for a thousand feet to a sheer wall of crags; its jagged edges pierced the sky.

There were no human beings to be seen, but smoke was rising from several of the buildings, which all had an air of being lived in. They vaguely suggested a Swiss village, only that the buildings were larger, more beautiful and dignified; and poverty was absolutely lacking. The tang in the air, the dancing sunlight and the color all suggested Switzerland, the illusion being heightened by the sound of bells, not quite like cow bells because more mellow, but suggestive nonetheless.

The track, which was paved now with limestone flags, led under an arch in the midst of the largest building. The arch turned out to be the opening of a tunnel, twenty feet high at lowest and as many wide, that pierced the mountain for more than a hundred yards, making two sharp turns where it crossed caverns and followed natural fissures in the limestone, before it emerged on the edge of a sheer ravine, overlooking another valley that appeared to approach the gorge of the Brahmaputra at an angle of nearly forty-five.

Away in the distance, like a roaring curtain, emerald green and diamond white, blown in the wind, the Tsango-po river, half a mile wide, tumbled down a precipice between two outflung spurs that looked like the legs of a seated giant. The falls were leagues away, and yet their roar came downwind like the thunder of creation.

Below them, incalculably far below the summit, the rising spray formed a dazzling rainbow; and where, below the falls, the Tsango-po became the Brahmaputra, there were rock-staked rapids more than two miles wide that threw columns of white water fifty feet in air, so that the rocks looked like leviathans at war.

The path led up the side of the ravine, curved around a projecting shoulder, and entered another tunnel, which emerged at the end of fifty yards into a natural cavern. There the bearers set the stretcher down and two of them offered to help Ommony up a long flight of steps hewn from the limestone rock. However, he managed to walk unaided and Diana followed him through a great gap in the wall into what was evidently the basement of a building.

THERE he was met by a brown-robed monk—not an Abor, a Tibetan—who smiled but made no remark and led him up winding stairways between thick masonry walls to a gallery that overhung the valley from a height which made the senses reel.

It was the upper of two galleries that ran along the face of a building backed against a cliff; doors and small windows opened all the way along it, but the Tibetan led around the far corner, where the wooden planking came to an end at a stone platform and there was one solitary door admitting to a room about thirty feet by twenty, that had a window facing the tremendous Tsango-po falls.

It was in all respects a comfortable room, with a fireplace at one end and a bright fire

burning. On either side of the fireplace there were shelves stacked with European books, in several languages. A cot stood against the wall opposite the fireplace; the table and chairs were plain, and evidently fashioned on the spot by some one with an eye for symmetry; the walls were hung with embroidered draperies, on one of which a magnificent yellow dragon pranced rampant on a field of blue. The stone floor was covered with a heavy Chinese rug. There was no glass in the window, but there were heavy shutters to exclude wind and rain, as well as silken Chinese curtains.

The monk went away and returned presently with a pitcher of milk and some peculiar cakes that tasted as if made from a mixture of flour and nut-meat, raised with butter. He signed to Ommony to eat and, when he had finished, took the pitcher and plate away again.

Ommony warmed his legs at the fire, rubbed them to reduce the stiffness, and chose a book at random—Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason"; it was well thumbed. He sat down in a chair before the fire to read, regarding the book as no more incomprehensible than his own predicament and likely to keep his mind off profitless conjecture.

He was too tired to think about his own problem—too sore in every muscle to consider sleep. One fact was clear: He had been admitted to the Abor Valley, and there must be some reason for it. For the time being, that was enough—that, and the comforting sense that all motion had ceased and he could sit still within four walls that shut off the stunning hugeness of the scenery. He had no geographical curiosity—was not qualified in any event to make a map that would be of real value, and was not sure it would be courteous to try to do it.

People who don't invade other people's countries have a right to their own privacy. Besides, he was quite sure he could never retrace the way into the valley, and doubtful whether he could find a way out of it, except down that thundering river. He was absolutely at the lama's mercy, and he was entirely sure that the lama was a man of superb benevolence, if nothing else.

Finding he could not make head or tail of Kant in the original German—he spent ten minutes trying to find the subject of one verb—he put the book down and began to wonder whether this was the place in which his sister and Jack Terry had died. Time vanished.

Thought took him back to the day when he had sent for his sister Elsa, then seventeen, to come to India and keep house for him. He frowned, blaming himself for having been the cause of all she suffered. They had had so much in common, and he had understood so well her craving for knowledge that is not in any of the text books, that he had tacitly encouraged her to make acquaintances which his better judgment should have warned him to keep out of her reach.

He wondered just to what extent a man is justified in guiding or obstructing a younger sister's explorations into unknown realms of thought—knew that he himself would resent any leading rein—knew, nevertheless, that he felt guilty of having neglected to protect his sister until protection and precaution were too late. He had done his best then, but——

"——, are we or aren't we free agents?" he asked aloud, staring at the fire; and then he heard Diana's tail beating the Chinese rug.

It sounded as if the dog were laughing at him! He turned his head sharply—and saw the lama standing in the doorway.

"We are free—to *become* agents of whatever power we wish," said the lama, smiling. "Don't get up, my son. I know how thighs ache after a climb up the stairs of the Temple of Stars. The sirdar does not know the other entrance to the valley."

"Where is he?" asked Ommony, staring.

He was not particularly interested in the sirdar. A suggestion as to who and what the lama might be had occurred to him suddenly. He was sparring for time to follow up that thought.

"He returned," said the lama, sitting on a chair before the fire, betraying an inclination to tuck his legs up under him but resisting it. "The Abors would have killed him if he passed beyond the opening. They would have killed *you*—if it were not for Diana the dog. My son, you wonder why I left you in Darjiling?

"There were seven reasons; of which the first is that I have no right to lead you out of your environment; and the second, that you *have* the right to make your own decision. The third reason was that these Abors guard their valley very strictly; it is their valley; they also have their rights. The fourth reason was that an excuse must

be presented to the Abors for admitting you. The fifth, that I alone could do that. The sixth, that I must make the excuse in advance of your coming, since they would not listen unless given time to consider the matter. And the seventh reason was, that it was fitting you should learn *why* this has been kept from you for twenty years, before you learn as much of the secret as I can show you. Behind each of those seven reasons are seven more beyond your comprehension. You spoke with Miss Sanburn?"

Ommony nodded. Suspicion was approaching certainty. He wondered that the thought had not occurred to him long before.

"Where is the *chela* — Samding — Elsa Terry—my niece?" he asked.

There is no foretelling which emotion will come uppermost. He felt a bit humiliated. It annoyed him to think he had lived for two months in almost constant association with his sister's child and had never guessed it; it annoyed him more, to think that the lama should not have trusted him from the beginning; most of all that he had not guessed the lama's identity.

He felt almost sure that he had guessed right at last. Nothing but a western dread of seeming foolish restrained him from guessing aloud.

But the lama read his thoughts, and answered the unspoken question first in his own way, his bright old eyes twinkling amid the wrinkles:

"Those who are trustworthy, my son, eventually prove it—always; and it is only they to whom secrets should be told. It is not enough that a man shall say, 'Lo, I am this, or I am that.' Nor is it enough that other men shall say the same to him. Some men are trustworthy in some respects, and not in others. He who trusts, and is betrayed, is answerable to his own soul—Do you think it would have been *fair* to trust you with the secret of my *chela?*" he asked suddenly.

"Fair to whom?" Ommony retorted. He knew quite well what the lama meant, but he did not want to commit himself to answer. He had a feeling that the lama was in some way testing him, and that a lot depended on it.

"Fair to you—or to San-fun-ho?" said the lama.

Ommony side-stepped the question by asking another:

"Why do you call her San-fun-ho?"

"It is her name. It was I who gave it to her. She accepted it, when she was old enough to understand its meaning. Do you know Chinese? The word means 'Possessor of the three qualities,' but its inner meanings are many: Righteousness, virtuous action, purity, benevolence, moral conduct, ingenuousness, knowledge, endurance, music—and all the qualities that lie behind those terms."

"You think she has them?" Ommony asked. His voice held a hint of sarcasm. He intended that it should.

"My son, we all have them," said the lama. "But she is the first *ordinary* mortal I have known, who could *express* them."

Ommony pricked his ears at the word "ordinary." He felt sure at last.

"You know—you have *seen* the 'Masters'?" he demanded.

The lama blinked, but otherwise ignored the question exactly as every one he had asked, who was likely to know, always had avoided it. There is a legend about mysterious "Mahatmas,"* whom all the East believes in, but whom none from the West has ever met—and talked much about afterward.

The legend persists, mocked by the missionaries and denied by governments, but believed, nevertheless, by multitudes of ignorant people and by an increasing number of thoughtful investigators; there is much vague rumor and some corroborated detail, but whoever really knows the facts is silent.

"No man ever had such a *chela,*" said the lama, betraying the first hint of personal emotion Ommony had ever noticed in him.

"*Are you one of the Masters?*" Ommony demanded, sitting bolt upright, studying the old man's face.

BUT the lama laughed, his wrinkles dancing with amusement.

"My son, that is a childish question," he said after a moment. "If a man were to tell you he is one of the Masters, he would be a liar and a boaster; because it must be evident to any one who thinks, that the more a man knows, the more surely he knows there are greater ones than himself. He is a Master, whose teaching you accept. But if he should tell you there is

*Vide "The Secret Doctrine," by H. P. Blavatsky; and "The King of the World" in *The Century Magazine*, December, 1923.

none superior to himself, it would be wise to look for another Master!"

But Ommony felt more sure than ever. He knew that Pythagoras, for instance, and Appolonius and scores of others had gone to India for their teaching. For twenty years he had kept ears and eyes alert for a clue that might lead him to one of the preservers of the ancient wisdom, who are said to mingle with the crowd unrecognized and to choose those to whom they will impart their secrets.

He had met self-styled "Gurus" by the dozen—a perfect host of more or less obvious charlatans;—some self-deceived dabluers in the occult whose motives might be more or less respectable, but never a one, unless this man, whose speech and conduct had appeared to him consistent with his idea of what a real Mahatma might be.

"Hannah Sanburn told me," he said slowly, "that there are individuals to whom you go for advice. Did she tell the truth?"

"She received that truth from my lips," said the lama, nodding.

"Are *they* the Masters?"

"The Masters are only discoverable to those, who in former lives have earned the right to discover them," the lama answered. "There is a Higher Law that governs these things. It is the Law of Evolution. We evolve from one state to another, life after life, being born into such surroundings as provide us with the proper opportunity. It was not by accident, my son, that Sanfun-ho was brought into the Abor Valley to be born."

"Do the Masters live here?"

"No," said the lama, smiling again.

"Then what is the particular advantage of the Abor Valley?"

"My son, I do not rule the universe! It was not my province to arrange the stars! There is no place, no circumstance that does not have particular advantages. The Abor Valley is more suitable to some than to others, but I am not the one who selects those who shall come here."

"Who does?"

"There is a law that governs it, just as there is a law that rules the stars, and a law that obliges one to be born rich and another poor. When did cause begin? And when shall effect cease? Can you answer that?"

"At any rate, you were the cause of my coming here," said Ommony.

"Nay, my son! No more than I was the cause of your coming into the world. If I should have caused you to come here, I should be responsible for all the consequences; and I do not know what those might be. I have *permitted* you to come here. I have removed some difficulties."

"Why?"

"Because I sought to remove other difficulties from the path of some one else, and it seemed to me possible that you might be the one who can assist. Remember: It was not I who caused you to resign your position under the Indian Government; not I who appointed you a Trustee at Tilgaun; nor I who invited you to disguise yourself as a Bhat-Brahman. Have I ever given you advice on any of these matters?"

"No," Ommony admitted. "But you have corresponded with me ever since Marmaduke died, and if your letters weren't educative, what were they?"

"Evocative!" the lama answered. "Shall I show you the copies of all the letters I have written to you? I believe you will not find one word in them that might evoke from you anything except your higher nature, nor one word that you could twist into inducement to do this, or to do that. I have taught you nothing. You have tried to understand my letters, and have found a guiding force within yourself. I am not your guide."

"Well then—why the interest in me?" Ommony retorted.

"My son, you are immensely interesting," said the lama. "You were forced on my attention. I have my work to do, and I have nearly finished it."

The old man paused, and suddenly he seemed so old and tired that all his previous exertions—night-long rides on camel-back, two months of journeying in the heat of the Indian plains, patient control of a dramatic company, and, not least, the return across the mountains to his home—appeared incredible. For a moment sadness seemed to overwhelm him. Then he smiled, and as if his will shone through the cloud and warmed the worn-out flesh, he threw off fifty years.

"For what purpose are we in the world?" he asked. "The purpose lies in front of each of us. It is never more than one step in advance, and whither it leads, who knows? It is the best that we can do at any moment that is required of us. A tree,

should grow. Water should run. A shoemaker should make shoes. A musician should make music. A teller of tales should tell them. Eyes are to see with. Ears are for hearing.

"Each man's own environment is his own universe, and he the master or the victim of it in exactly the degree by which he governs or is governed by himself. Could you have patience with me, if I should tell a little—just a little of my own experience?"

"Good ——!" said Ommony. "I'd rather hear it than find a fortune! Ears are to hear with!" he added, grinning, settling himself back into the chair to listen.

"Some men listen to the wrong sound," said the lama. "It is good to listen carefully, and to speak only after much thought. I will not tell more than is required to make a certain matter clear. Thereafter, you must use your own judgment, my son."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE LAMA'S STORY

I have conversed with many priests; and some were honest men, and some were not, but three things none of them could answer: If their god is all-wise, what does it matter if men are foolish? And if they can imagine and define their god, must he not be smaller than their own imaginations? Furthermore, if their god is omnipotent, why does he need priests and ritual?—From the Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

"I AM a Ringding, of the order of Gelong Lamas. That is neither a high rank nor a low one; but high enough to provide the outer forms of dignity, and low enough to avoid the snares of pride. I have ever found contentment in the Middle Way. I was born in Lassa," Tsiang Samdup began, and then paused and got down on the rug, where he could sit cross-legged and be comfortable. Diana went and laid her great head on his knee.

"Just a minute," said Ommony. "How old are you?"

But Tsiang Samdup smiled.

"My son," he answered, "we live as long as we are useful, and as long as it is good for us to live. Thereafter we die, which is another form of living, even as ice and water and rain and dew are the same thing in different aspects. When the appointed time comes, we return, as the rain returns, to the earth it has left for a season. As I told you, I was born in Lassa."

He rubbed the dog's head as if he were erasing unnecessary details from the tablets of memory. Then he laid a stick of pinewood on the fire deliberately, and watched it burn. It was several minutes before he spoke again.

"The Dalai Lama is a person who is mocked by Western thinkers. The few Europeans who have been to Lassa have hastened to write books about him, in which they declare he is the ignorant head of a grossly superstitious religion.

"To which I have nothing to say, except this: That it is evident the writers of those books have been unable to expose the Dalai Lama's secrets. An army, which invaded Lassa, failed to expose them with its bayonets.

"I, who took the highest possible degrees at Oxford and have lived in Paris, in Vienna, and in Rome—so that I know at least something of the Western culture—regard the Dalai Lama with respect—which is different, my son, from superstitious awe. The Tashi Lama, who does not live in Lassa, is as high above the Dalai Lama as a principle is higher than a consequence.

"There was a Tashi Lama who selected me, for reasons of his own, for certain duties. I was very young then—conscious of the host of lower impulses and far from the self-knowledge that discriminates between the higher and the lower. To me in those days my desire was law; and I had not yet learned to desire the Middle Way, which leads between the dangers of ambition and inertia."

Tsiang Samdup paused again and stared out of the window at an eagle which soared higher and higher on motionless wings, adjusting its balance accurately to the flukes of wind.

"We learn by experience," he went on after a while. "Few of us remember former lives, and those who say they do are for the most part liars, although there are some who are deceived by imagination, but the experience of former lives is in our favor—or against us, as the case may be.

"Its total is what some call instinct, others intuition; but there is a right name for it, and there are those whose past experience equips them with ability to recognize that stage in others at which the higher nature begins to overwhelm the lower. They are able to assist the process. But such men are exceedingly rare, though there

are hosts of fools and rogues who pretend to the gift, which comes not by desire but by experience endured in many lives.

"That Tashi Lama said to me:

" 'My son, it may amuse you to linger for a few lives on the lower path; for you are strong, and the senses riot in you; and it is not my duty to impose on you one course of conduct, if you prefer another. It is very difficult to rise against the will, but very easy if the will directs.'

"And I, because I loved him, answered I would do his bidding. But he said:

" 'Nay. Each man must, each minute, make his destiny. It is your own will, not mine, that directs you. Shall I fight your will, and force you to attempt the better way? Then I should submit you to the shame of an inevitable fall, for which I should be responsible. But I perceive that the time has come when you may choose, and that your will is strong enough to make the choice and hold to it. You may be a benefactor or a beneficiary—a man, aware of manhood, or a victim of the lower senses, bound to the wheel of necessity. Which shall it be?'

"And because he had discerned, and had chosen the right moment, there was a surging of the spirit in me, and as it were an awakening.

"I said to him: 'I have chosen.' And he asked me: 'Which way?' To which I answered at once: 'The higher.' Whereat he laughed; for I do not doubt that he saw the pride and the ambition that were cloaked within the answer.

"Thereafter he considered me for a long time before he spoke. And when I had waited so long that I supposed he would say no more at all, he said this:

" 'They who take the higher way in the beginning are consumed with arrogance; they mortify the flesh and magnify the will until there is no balance left; and when, after their period of death, they are born again, it is into a feeble body possessed by a demon will that tortures it; even as they who choose the lower way are reborn into brutal bodies with feeble wills.'

"Whereat I asked him: 'How then shall I choose between the higher and the lower, since both are evil?' And he considered me again, a long time.

"At last he said this: 'There is the Middle Way; but there are few who find it, and yet fewer who persist in it, because pride tempts one way and sloth the other.'

"And I said: 'I have chosen.' And he said: 'Speak.' And I said: 'Let it be the Middle Way.' Whereat he did not laugh but considered me again for many minutes; and at the end of it, he said:

" 'My son, you have much strength. If you persist and keep the Middle Way, you have a destiny and you shall not die until you have fulfilled it. But beware of pride; and above all, seek no knowledge for your own sake.'

"At that time he said no more, but I became his *chela*. I washed his feet, and I swept the floor of his chamber, which was less than this one and less comfortably furnished. He taught me many things, but mainly patience, of which I lacked more in those days than a snake lacks legs. I supposed that before his time should come to die he would prefer me to high office. But nay. On a certain day he sent for me and said:

" 'I shall die on the eleventh day from now, at noon. Tomorrow at dawn take the road into India, and go to Delhi, to a certain house in a certain street, and there learn the tongue of the English. Thence, I having made provision for it, journey to England, to a University called Oxford; there learn all that the University can teach—and particularly all that they think they know about philosophy and religion.'

"I said to him: 'Why?' And he said: 'I know not why; but I tell you what I know it is good for you to do. There is a destiny which, if you fail not, you shall fulfill. But beware of the Western knowledge, which is corrupt and strained through the sieve of convenience.

" 'I do not know, but it may be that you must learn the Western teachings for another's sake. Who can teach a horse unless he understands the way of horses? Who can make a sword unless he understands the qualities of steel?'

"And I said to him: 'Shall I be a swordsmith?' But he answered: 'Nay. I said you have a destiny to fulfill.' So I asked: 'When?' But he said:

" 'I know not. However, I know this: That if you seek your own advancement, you will fail. And there is a certain condition in you that will inevitably bring you to a death by violence because of lies that you yourself will tell; but because of your

strength that may not come to pass until your work is finished.'

"So I said to him: 'How shall I know what my work is?' And he answered: 'That will appear.' But I said: 'If you, my great and very holy master, are to die, who then shall show me how to fulfill this destiny?' And he answered:

" 'It is for you to become fit to be the tool of destiny, and to hold yourself at all times ready. There are those from whom, at the proper time, you may receive the right advice.'

"So I asked: 'How shall I find them?' And he answered: 'They will find you.'

"Thereafter I besought him earnestly that I might remain with him in Lassa until his death, because I was his *chela*, and that is no commonplace relationship. Its roots lie deeper than the roots of trees. But he answered:

" 'The first duty of a *chela* is obedience.' "

TSIANG SAMDUP paused and stared through the open window at the sky for several minutes. Eyes and sky were so exactly the same color that it looked as if the substance of the sky had crept within him and appeared through slits amid the walnut wrinkles of his face.

"It was midwinter," he said after a while, "and no light task to cross the passes. But the route the Tashi Lama gave me was this way, through the Abor Valley, and I lay for a month in this monastery, recovering from frost-bite and exhaustion.

"And as I lay between life and death, one came to me who had a pilgrim's staff, and no outward appearance of greatness, who considered me in silence for a long while; but the silence appeared to me like the voice of the universe, full of music, yet without sound. He went away. But in three days' time, when I was already far recovered—for I was ever strong—he returned and led me to what I will show you tonight and tomorrow. And I saw myself within myself."

He paused again, and again the far-away look in his eyes searched the sky and seemed to blend with it.

"He carried me forth," he said presently, "I lying like a dead man in his arms. His voice in my ear was as a mother's speaking to a child.

" 'It is well,' said he. 'Now set forth on your journey, and remember. For you know now what you have to overcome, and also what is yours *wherewith* to overcome.'

"So after certain days I set forth, and in due time I came to Delhi, where I studied English. Thereafter I went to England."

The wrinkles moved in silent laughter, and the old eyes twinkled reminiscently as they looked into Ommony's.

"My son, that was no light experience! It was warfare, and myself the battlefield. Warfare, bewilderment and loneliness. Curiosity, contempt, discourtesy, indifference—all these were shown toward me. And there were very generous men at Oxford, whose pride was racial not intellectual, who were as patient in the teaching as the sun is patient to the growing grass—most worthy and laughter-loving men, mistaken in much, but as sure of the reward of generosity as there is surely good will in their hearts.

"They did not know I was Tibetan; they believed I was Chinese, because I speak and write that language, and none knew anything about Tibet; so I avoided the pitfalls that lie in the path of those who are suspected by the West of even slight familiarity with Eastern magic. When I spoke of the lore of the East, I was not asked to produce phenomena.

"But there were students from Bengal, who dabbled in such things and sought notoriety by means of childish tricks performed within the fringe of the occult. He who truly understands such matters is the last to trifle with them, and I held my peace.

"I came to understand that the cycles of evolution are moving westward, and that the West is arrogant with the strength it feels within itself. I saw, my son, that the West is deceived by the glitter of results, knowing nothing of causes, and that the East is in turn deceived by the wealth and ostentation of the West—for this is Kali Yuga,* when delusion and a blindness overspread the world.

"I knew, for none had better right to know, that strength can be guided into the grooves of destiny, and that knowledge is the key. But I perceived that great harm can be done by interference. There is danger in another's duty. Also I saw that *my* voice, however reasonably raised, could accomplish nothing, because of the racial prejudice.

* The age of darkness.

"The West is curious about the East, but proud, contemptuous, and most cruel when it most believes it is benevolent. The West sends missionaries to the East, who teach the very culture that is poisoning the life-springs of the West itself.

"The strength of the West and its generous impulse must be guided. Its rapacity must be restrained. But it was clear to me that I could not accomplish that, since none would listen to me. The few who pretended to listen merely sought to use my teaching for their own enrichment and advantage.

"I met a certain one in London. He appeared to be English, but that meant nothing. He had the Ancient Wisdom in his eyes. I had taken my degrees at Oxford then, and I was sitting in the Strangers' Gallery of the House of Parliament. I remember I grieved; for I saw how eager those debaters were to rule the whole world wisely —yet how ignorant they were of the very rudiments of what could possibly enable them to do it.

"I said to him, who was in the corner next to me:

" 'These men boast of what is right, and they believe their words; but they do not know what is right. Who shall save them?'

"And he answered, after he had considered me a while in silence:

" 'If *you* know what is right, you will attend to your own duty.'

"So I went and lived in Paris for a while, and in Vienna and in Rome, because it was my duty to learn how the West thinks, and in what way it is self-deceived. And thereafter I returned to Tibet, wondering. It did not seem to me that I was one step forward on the path of destiny. I could see —for I had walked the length of India with pilgrim's staff and begging bowl—that the West was devouring the East and the East was inert in the grip of superstition, inclined, if it should move at all, to imitate the West and to corrupt the western energy by specious flattery, hating its conquerors, yet copying those very methods that made conquest possible.

"An unfathomable sadness overwhelmed me. It appeared to me that all my knowledge was as nothing. I doubted the stars in the sky; I said: 'These, too, are a delusion of the senses. Who shall prove to me that I am not deceived in all things?' "

TSIANG SAMDUP paused and thought awhile, stroking Diana's head.

"My son," he said presently, "it was as if the knowledge that was born within me, and all the false Western doctrine I had studied, were as waters meeting in the basin of my mind, and in the whirlpool my faith was drowning. It is ever so when truth meets untruth, but I did not know that then.

"I went to the Tashi Lama—the successor of my teacher. He was but a child, and I was ashamed to lay my heart before him, though I laid my forehead on the mat before his throne, for the sake of the traditions and my master's memory.

"And to me, as I left the throne-room sadly, one of the Regents, drawing me aside, said:

" 'I have heard a destiny awaits you.'

"I asked: 'From whom have you heard that?' But he did not say. To him I laid bare the affliction that was eating out my heart; and to me he said: 'Good. This is a time of conquest of self by the Self; I foresee that the higher will win.'

"Thereafter he spoke of the folly of stirring molten metal with a wooden spoon. He bade me let my thoughts alone. And because he saw in me a pride of knowledge that was at the root of my affliction, he appointed me a temple neophite.

"He who was set over me had orders to impose severe tasks. I hewed wood. I carried water. I laid heavy masonry, toiling from sunrise until dark. I labored in the monastery kitchen. I dug gold on the plateau, where for nine months of every year the earth is frozen so hard that a strong man can with difficulty dig two baskets-full. By day I toiled. By night I dreamed dreams—grand dreams full of quiet understanding—so that to me it seemed the night was life, and the day death.

"I was well contented to remain there in the goldfields, because it seemed to me I had found my destiny; the miners were well pleased to listen to me in the intervals when we leaned on the tools and rested, and when the blizzards blew and we were herded, very close together for the warmth, and with the animals between us, in the tents.

"But when the Tashi Lama, who succeeded him whose *chela* I had been, came to man's estate he sent for me. And after he had talked with me awhile on many matters he promoted me. I became a lama of the

lowest rank, and yet without the ordinary duties of a lama.

"I had time to study and arrange the ancient books; of which, my son, there are more than the West imagines; they are older than the West believes the world to be, and they are written in a language that extremely few can read. But I can read them. And I learned that my dreams were realities—although the dreams ceased in those days.

"Once, that one who had come to me when I lay sick in this place on my journey southward, came to me in Lassa, where I was pondering the ancient books and rearranging them. And to him I said: 'Lo, I have met my destiny! I see that it is possible to translate some of these into the Western tongues.'

"But he answered: 'Who would believe? For this is Kali Yuga. Men think that nothing is true unless they can turn it into money and devour what they can purchase with it. If you give too much food to a starving horse, will he thrive? Or will he gorge himself to death?'

"Said I: 'Light travels fast.'

"Said he: 'It does. But it requires a hundred million years for the light of certain stars to reach the earth. And how long does it take for the formation of coal, that men burn in a minute? Make no haste, or they will burn thee! They have Plato and Pythagoras and Appolonius, Jesus, the Buddha, Mohammed and others. Would you give them a new creed to go to war about, or a new curiosity to buy and sell for their museums? Which?'

"Thereafter the Tashi Lama sent for me, and I was given no more time to study the ancient books. But I was promoted to the rank of Gelong, and became a Ringding, whose duty was to teach the people as much as they could understand. I discovered it was not much that they could understand. They knew the meaning of desire, and of the belly-ache that comes from too much eating.

"I found that if one man learns more than another, he is soon so filled with pride that he had better have been left in ignorance; and I also found that men will accept any doctrine that flatters their desires or excuses ignorance, but that they seek to vilify and kill whoever teaches them to discipline the senses in order that their higher nature may appear and make them wise.

"There is no difference in that respect, although men are fond of saying that the West is quite unlike the East. East or West they will murder any one who teaches them to think except in terms of the lower self.

"There was an outcry against me in Lassa, and there were many lamas who declared I should be put on trial for heresy. I was stoned in the streets; and the great dogs that devour the dead were incited to attack me.

"So I said: 'Lo, it may be then I have fulfilled my destiny. For he who was my teacher prophesied that there is that in me which must inevitably bring me to a violent end. Nevertheless, I have told no lies yet, that I know of!'

"But the Dalai Lama sent men—they were soldiers—who, under pretense of throwing me in prison, hid me in a certain place. And escaping thence by night, with one to guide me, I went on a journey of many days, to a village where none knew me where I dwelt safely; so that I thought that my teacher had prophesied falsely, and for a while again I doubted.

"But there came to me that same one who had come when I lay sick in this place on my journey southward, and he said to me: 'Have you learned yet that the stars and the seasons keep their course and the appointed times, and that no seed grows until the earth is ready?'

"And I said: 'How shall I know when it is ready? And who shall tell me the appointed time?' For I was full of a great yearning to be useful.

"But he answered: 'Who rules the stars? Until you can control yourself, how shall you serve others?'

"But I was burning with desire to serve, and moreover indignant at persecution, for in those days I had very little wisdom. I was as a fool who puts his face into a hornets' nest to tell the hornets of the Higher Law.

"And I said to him: 'I am beginning to doubt all things.'

" 'Nay,' said he, 'for you began that once before, and made an end of it. You are beginning now to doubt your own impetuosity, and that is good, for you will learn that power lies in patience.

" 'He who will play in the symphony awaits the exact moment before he strikes his note. You forget that the world

existed many million years, and that you lived many scores of lives, before you came to this pass. Will you sow seed in midwinter because it wearies you to wait until the spring?'

"And when he had considered me again for a long while, he went away, saying that he would doubtless speak with me again, should the necessity arise. And before many days there came a message from Lassa, saying that one was dead who had charge of this monastery in the Abor Valley, and that the Dalai Lama had appointed me to take his place.

"So hither I came, and was at peace. And many years, my son, I lived here, studying the ancient mysteries, considering the stars, and not seldom wondering what service to the world my destiny might hold in store. I made ready; I held myself ready."

CHAPTER XXX

THE LAMA'S STORY (CONTINUED)

And I have asked this of the priests, but though they answered with a multitude of words, their words were emptiness: If it is true that a priest can pacify and coax God, or by meditation can relieve another from the consequences of his own sin, why should any one be troubled and why do the priests not put an end forever to all sin and suffering? If they can, and do not, they are criminals. If they can not, but pretend that they can, they are liars. Nevertheless, there is a middle judgment, and it seems to me that some of them may be mistaken.—From the Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

A MONK brought food and set it on a stool between Tsiang Samdup and Ommony. They ate in silence—the monk watching—the lama tossing scraps to Diana, his wrinkles rippling into a smile each time she caught a piece of meat in midair. Then, when the monk went away with the remnants, he resumed his story abruptly, before Ommony could start to question him.

"You will observe, my son, as you grow wiser, that whatever is of real value in the world is faced about with danger. There is a reason why this should be so. When the proper time arrives it will be known that, for instance, in Yucatan and in Peru and in Brazil, where there are now savages, disease and jungle, there lie secrets which await the future of the human race. It is so in Tibet. It is so here, in the Abor Valley.

"The dangers are of a kind which certain types of men can overcome; and certain of those types are very honorable men, whose courage and persistence do them credit. But they are not men who would understand the secrets if they *should* discover them. Soldiers, hunters, naturalists and, for that matter, prospectors are no more likely to discover the secrets of which I speak than a maker of machinery is likely to discover how to paint a picture.

"There are also, here and there in certain places, objects which would have a commercial value, and which would therefore be in constant danger of discovery before the proper time, unless peculiar precautions had been taken. Some of the precautions are amusingly simple, although for that very reason efficient.

"There is the Ka'aba at Mecca, for instance, which scientists will assure you is a meteorite, but which Mohammedans protect with rigorous zeal. Mohammed knew what it is, and there are others who know; but the time has not come for the truth to be explained, because of the prevailing ignorance.

"My son, since the beginning of the world —and your brain can not imagine how long ago that was—there has never been one minute when the knowledge that was in the beginning has been utterly forgotten. There have always been men who possessed and guarded the secrets; and there always will be such men.

"There is not a religion in the world that is not based on the tradition that such secrets do exist; there is not a philosophy that is not founded on the ancient mysteries; there is not a modern science, however perverted and material, that is not an effort to discover and to put to use some aspect of the ancient knowledge and the Higher Law.

"There is a Law of Evolution. Scientists have touched the fringe of it, and what do they tell you in consequence? That man has evolved from the worms! There is a Law of Cause and Effect, of which one infinitely tiny fraction has been dimly sensed. To what use do they put it? They brew poison-gas, with which to murder one another!

"There is a Law of Cycles, as the astronomers can tell you, and as financiers begin vaguely to understand. But those who think they understand it use the secret to enrich themselves—by each enrichment of themselves afflicting others. Men dig in the ruins of Egypt and Babylon, but buy and sell the trophies, and draw the absurd

deduction that they know more than all the ancients did—even as worms digging in a carcass may imagine themselves superior to the life that once used that body for a while.

"Do you begin to see, my son, why it would be unwise to reveal the ancient wisdom by more than infinitesimal fragments at a time? I heard, when I was in Delhi, that the men of the West are studying the construction of the atom, and have guessed at the force imprisoned in it. Wait until they have learned how to explode the atom, and then see what they will do to one another!

"But you will notice this, as you grow wiser. There is a fitness in things. There is a balance in the universe and an Intelligence that governs it. No man can escape the consequences of his own act, though it take him a million lives to redress the balance.

"Justice is inevitable. Evil produces evil, and is due to ignorance. But Justice being infinite in all its ways, there is a Middle Way by which we may escape from ignorance.

"I, who saw the world increasing its downward impetus while it believes itself to be progressing upward through the invention of new means for exploiting selfishness; I, who saw the ruins of Egypt, and of Babylon; of Rome and Greece; of Jerusalem; of Ceylon; of India; I, who have lived for fifty years within a stone's throw of a city ten times older than Babylon; I *knew* that day follows night, and I waited for the dawn, not knowing the hour. I waited.

"I knew there are those who have won merit in their former lives, whose time comes to be born again. I knew that the key to evolution is in character, not in numbers or material increase—in the character of the soul, my son! I knew that at the right time those would begin to be born, whose character would influence the world, as mine could not. And I waited, studying the Jade of Abor.

"For the Jade, my son, was set here in the dawn of time by men who understood how to make a mirror for the soul, even as men nowadays make mirrors that reflect stars which no eye can detect. You laugh? That is not wise! Men laughed, remember, at Galileo. They laughed at Newton. I had not thought you were one who mocks what is contrary to common superstition."

"My father," said Ommony, "you are confirming rumors I have heard on and off for twenty years. I was laughing at the men who told me I was a fool to pay any attention to such madness."

"Nor was that wise!" the lama answered. "It is foolish either to laugh or to grieve over other men's ignorance; the hidden motive of that laughter or grief is pride, which blinds the faculties."

HE LOOKED at Ommony a very long time in silence, studying him.

"It is also unwise to speak of truths to men who prefer untruths," he said at last. "They proceed to indiscretions, for which the speaker is in part responsible. But I think, my son, you see the error of that way. The Jade of Abor is a mirror of the human soul. Whoever looks in it beholds his lower nature first; and there are few who can look long enough to see the first gleam of their higher nature shining through the horrors that the Jade reveals.

"When I first looked into the Jade, he who led me to behold it carried me forth like a dead man. And I had been the *chela* of the Tashi Lama! I will lead you to the Jade; but will you dare to look?"

He paused, his bright old eyes observing Ommony's with that disturbing stare with which an artist studies the face of one whose portrait he is painting.

"There was a time," he went on, "when those who professed to be teachers were stood before the Jade of Abor, that their own characters might be revealed to them. Those who could endure the test—and they were few—might teach; and those who failed, might not. For it is character that must be taught; all else depends on it. That time will come again, but not yet.

"Today, if men knew of the Jade of Abor they would seize on it. They would test their rulers by it, as they try their criminals. They would overthrow whoever failed the test—and all would fail. Thereafter intellectual men would seize power, who would destroy the stone asserting its magic quality was superstition—and that one fragment of the ancient knowledge would be lost.

"And now," he paused again, "I read temptation in your mind. You think that I, who have enabled you to reach this valley, will enable you to leave it; and that is true, you shall return to India unharmed. But you think that you, and certain other men, might use that stone discreetly.

"Imagination tells you that to return to

the Abor Valley; that to occupy it by force or trickery, and so to obtain access to the stone would be a good thing, which should benefit the human race. Nay, my son, waste no words on denial, for I saw the thought!

"Therefore, I tell you this: The ancient wisdom is more wise than your imagination. They who know cause and effect can foretell consequences. Lest the evils should befall, that must inevitably follow if such an instrument were placed too soon into men's hands, the means to hide the stone, if necessary for another million years, has been placed in the hands of those who guard it. My son, men fight to the death over the Golden Rule. What would they *not* do with the Jade of Abor?

"You have heard that the Tsang-po River holds more water than the Brahmaputra, which is the same river lower down? Part of the Tsang-po pours into caverns, which have an outlet below Bengal to the sea. One man—and there is more than one who knows the secret—can in one moment admit a mighty river into caverns that are now dry. Then not an army of engineers could find the Jade of Abor in a thousand years.

"But—" he spoke very slowly—"he who had deliberately made that act necessary, having been warned, as *you* are warned, would be responsible. You can not foresee the consequences, but it may be that in a million lives you can not outlive them, because all the harm that, through you, befalls others must inevitably return to you for readjustment. It is well not to deceive yourself that this life is the last."

Ommony had sat still, lest interruption break the thread of the lama's story. But it appeared to be broken. His own personal relation to it stirred impatience.

"How, where, when did my sister and Jack Terry die?" he asked.

"Bear with me, my son. I have a great deal to tell, and not much time in which to tell it. My hour comes soon. There is a death awaiting me, and I am nearly ready."

The lama closed his eyes, his right hand patting Diana's head, as if he were eliminating detail and remembering the thread.

"I studied the Jade of Abor," he resumed after a long while. "Which is the same as to say that I studied my own failings and my own strength, using the one with which to conquer the other, so that light might flow into my mind. And many times that one came to me, of whom I spoke before—he who first led me to the Jade.

"Many times I journeyed into India. Many men I spoke with. And there came Marmaduke the American to Darjiling, much wrought up about the future of the world and very angry with the Christian missionaries. He offered me limitless money if I would go to the United States and teach. And as you know, when I refused—because I saw that that might be another's duty, but was not mine—he founded the Marmaduke Mission at Tilgaun and endowed it.

"He wished me to be a trustee, but I refused that also, until that one came to me, of whom I spoke before, and said it was not good to refuse the work that destiny had given me to do. Then I accepted, although it did not appear to me then that my act was wise.

"And you and Hannah Sanburn became the other trustees. And you and I corresponded, from which it became clear to me that you are a determined man, of good faith, having courage, but possessed by indignation against those whose vision of right and wrong is shorter than your own. And in indignation there is not much wisdom; so that I avoided meeting you.

"And then came Doctor Terry and your sister to this valley—children—hand in hand—as innocent as lambs—as brave and simple as two humming birds—in search of me, because, forsooth, they had been told I knew the secret of the Jade of Abor. She far-gone with child; he dying of wounds; the Abors hunting them—for the Abors guard this valley as cobras guard ancient ruins."

"How did they get into the valley?" asked Ommony.

"NONE knows. Not even I, nor the Abors. They suffered; they had no memory, except of caverns and of being washed along an ancient conduit underground. I heard of them, because the Abors asked me whether it were best to crucify them living or to cut them up and throw them into the Brahmaputra.

"The Abors said they seemed such unoffending people that it might be the Gods would be angry if they should put them to further pain; for these Abors are a simple, superstitious people, whose present testing it seems to be to guard this valley and its

secrets. They also said there was a baby to be born, and it is against the Abors' law to slay the mother until one month after childbirth; nevertheless, it is also against their law to admit strangers and to let them live.

"Therefore I lied to the Abors, inventing an ancient prophecy that a saint was to be born of strangers in this valley. Thus I rescued those two innocents, there being—as that Tashi Lama, whose *chela* I was, said—a condition in me, due to faults in former lives, that, though I may fulfil a useful destiny, I must come to a violent death through lies of my own telling.

"I lied to the Abors, and I had to keep on lying to them. But he who lies does well, my son, who gladly eats the consequences when he may, and ends them. Better a little self-surrender now than unknown consequences in the lives to come! I am answerable to the Abors. I would rather receive their judgment than that of the Unseen! It pays not to postpone the reckoning.

"The baby was born here, in this room, and those two children who were its parents died, though I did what might be done for them. I eased their death as well as I was able, giving them comfort in the knowledge that there are many lives to come, in which there is recompense for every thought and deed, as also opportunity to undo all the evil of the past.

"They died in peace, and I buried their bodies yonder; you can see the grave below this window—that mass of rocks, over which the purple flowers trail.

"Before she died, that child who was your sister gave her baby into my hands. It was her last effort. She *gave* the baby to me, not at my request. In the clarity of vision and the peace that precedes death, she *gave* her baby into my hands, smiling, saying: 'I see that this is as it should be. It could not have been otherwise.' "

For five minutes the lama was silent, remembering, his sky-blue eyes on vacancy, his wrinkles motionless.

"And so I understood my destiny," he went on presently. "I understood that in my hands lay one who was greater than myself—whom I might serve, that she might serve the world, as I can not by reason of my limitations. That little spark of life, if I should do my duty, should be fanned into a flame, whose light should blaze across the world, and bless, and brighten it.

"And I have served, my son. I know of no regrets. Day in, day out, for more than twenty years, I have fanned that flame, and nursed and fed it, letting no consideration hinder, omitting no experience that might serve, sparing her no duty, killing out my own pride, and my own weakness, lest it rob her of one element of virtue, inflicting no punishment—for who am I that I should dare to punish?—omitting no reproof—for who am I that I should dare to let the child deceive herself?

"I obtained a wet-nurse, who was doubtless born into this valley to that very end, the wife of an Abor chieftain, whose recent ancestors were healthy, whose mind was modest, unassuming, calm. I made that wet-nurse stand before the Jade of Abor, before I trusted the flow from her breasts.

"And I received advice, as he, whose *chela* I had been, prophesied. He, who had come to me in this place and in Lassa, came again. From him I learned that Hannah Sanburn might be trusted, and that if I should see fit to trust her no harm would come of it. I think she has told you, my son, what share she had in mothering the child."

Ommony nodded.

"Hannah is a noblewoman," he said gruffly. "I imagine she sacrificed more than——"

But the lama interrupted with a gesture of his hand.

"My son, there is no such thing as sacrifice, except in the imagination. There is opportunity to serve, and he who overlooks it robs himself. Would you call the sun's light sacrifice? But you are right when you say Hannah Sanburn is a noblewoman. Her nobility is part of her. It works. It overcomes the fear of what the world might say. It conquers pride. It leaves adjustment of all consequences to the Higher Law. It keeps faith. It knows no malice. It is brave.

"My burden, when I took that child to Tilgaun, was all that I could bear, because I loved her and I feared for her; but Hannah Sanburn's was no less, no atom less, when she returned the child to me.

"My hardest task has been to provide children of her own age, with whom she might play and be happy without besmirchment from their ignorance. For,

though she is able *now* to stand alone, and to burn up trash in the pure flame of her own character, she was then only a little, very clear flame, needing care— My son, I wonder if you guess how much care she has needed!

"The Tibetan children would have dimmed her light. They might have smothered it; because the lower yearns toward the higher. And though yeast is plunged into the dough and leavens it, the yeast is spent. It is not good to clean corruption with a golden broom, nor is it wise to take sap from the growing tree.

"But I have agents—agents here and there. We, who pursue the Middle Way, are not without resources. There was Benjamin, who is a man of very faithful pertinacity in some respects; and there are certain others, whom I employed.

"It is easy to find children who need saving from the rapacity of the world's convenience; but it is very difficult to make selection—much more difficult when agents do the choosing—and impossible, my son, to find such another child as San-fun-ho, because there is none like her in the world. I tell you, great ones are not born many at a time.

"I obtained many children hoping that among the many one or two might excel, as indeed it happened. The others are incapable in this life of much advancement, because of karma and the circumstances into which they had been born It is very difficult to help some individuals, because those who are born into an heredity are so born in order that they may make that experience, and battle with it, and acquire strength for the lives to come. But they have served; they have done royal service.

"For, as I have educated my *chela*, in turn she has educated them, learning through them how to practise the wisdom, which is nothing unless put to use. And, lest they lose one rightful opportunity, I found Tibetan girls for them to teach.

"You have seen for yourself that those children have grown into women, who are not without nobility. They have received ten thousand times more than they gave, and in the lives to come they will be ready to make progress. Meanwhile, some of them may make good teachers at Tilgaun."

"How many laws did you break in obtaining those children?" asked Ommony, smiling. He felt less critical than curious to know how the lama would defend himself.

"Many, perhaps. I do not know, my son. There is that which, because of errors in past lives, makes it impossible for me to do good without inflicting evil on myself. But it is better to do good than to fear evil. It is he who breaks the laws who must accept the consequences.

"It appears to me that I have injured none except myself; and, although I must meet in lives to come the consequence of having broken even human laws, I do not doubt that the service I have rendered will provide me strength with which to meet and overcome the karma. We can not do *all* the self-cleansing in *one* life. It is enough that we do what we can, and serve others."

"I am sorry I spoke," said Ommony. "I beg your pardon."

THE lama looked keenly at him.

"My son, it is not within your power to offend me, even if you had the wish to give offense, which I perceive is not so. I would not impose on you an account of my own fumblings with duty, if it were not that you are entitled to sufficient facts on which to base your judgment of what *your* duty may be. I endeavor to be brief.

"Life—right living is Art, my son, not artifice, and not an accumulation of possessions, or of power, but a giving forth of inner qualities. It is an expression of the higher nature, and that includes all the other arts—as music, painting, literature, oratory. Therefore San-fun-ho has had encouragement to exercise herself in all the arts.

"Above all drama! Drama is the way to teach. All life is drama; and by allegories, parables and illustrations men learn easily what no amount of argument will drive into their understanding. Because of sympathy, compassion and a knowledge of what difficulties and what ignorance the greatest and the least must face, my *chela* can play all parts. She understands. She knows the difference between the Higher and the Lower, and is not to be deceived by noise, or fear, or any man's opinion.

"Nor can her head be turned by flattery; for I have let men tempt her in the subtlest ways, they not knowing that they tempted. The superstitious worship those whose art excels their own, until the time comes when they meditate murder, and slander—

which is more cruel than murder—because they grow weary of emulation. And worship is the most poisonous of all corruption, to him who is the object of it.

"When an Abor, who was bribed by some ambitious men, broke away and stole a fragment of the Jade of Abor, and I learned that there were plans on foot to seduce men into all kinds of superstition with its aid, I seized that opportunity.

"I let word go forth through secret channels into India that she who is the rightful priestess of the Jade will come and find it. For there was never a doubt about that, my son. I knew I could trace the fragment and lay my hand on it."

"How?" asked Ommony.

But Tsiang Samdup could not be decoyed into explanation of that kind of secret.

"How do the pigeons find the way? Who guides the stars? Men speak of forces, and of laws and instinct, but forget that an Intelligence directs them all. The thing to study is intelligence, applying that to duty lest ambition upset the moral balance, which is a very dreadful form of mania, needing many lives before it can be overcome.

"It is better, my son, to learn too little than to strive to learn too much. Pursue the Middle Way; the time will come when you will understand what is at present dark to you.

"I seized that opportunity. I led my *chela*, clothed as a boy, for she can play all parts, on a journey into India, as you know. And, my son, I have made many errors in my day; I am but an old man seeking, through the cloud of ignorance, to do my duty, knowing what the duty is, but often misled by my own unwisdom.

"There were times, while my *chela* was growing, when I dreamed of triumphs for her among India's millions. In those deluded moods it had appeared to me—although none had better right than I to know the contrary—that if she should seize on the imagination of the East, which might very easily be done, the East would rise out of its ignorance and teach the West.

"I did not see, in those deluded hours, that the East would become filled with a self-righteousness that would be even worse, if that were possible, than what consumes the West and, seeking to throw off its conquerors, would plunge the whole world into war. You have heard of Gandhi? That is a man of singleness and merit, seeking, as it were, to hasten the precession of the equinox.

"Even as Gandhi has made mistakes, I made them, though with less excuse. During the lonely months when San-fun-ho was with Hannah Sanburn at Tilgaum I used to journey into India with staff and begging bowl, making my preparations for the day when San-fun-ho should teach an awakening multitude. Unwise—and the unwisdom multiplied by zeal! I raised too many expectations.

"He, who had come to me before, came once again, rebuking me. I told him of this and that which I had done, expecting praise.

"He said to me: 'Blood will flow. It will be you to whom the dead may look for recompense. How soon can you repay them all?'

"And I said: 'But I have promised. If I fail, will they not look to me for the fulfilment?'

"But *he* said: 'Which is better? To fail to do evil, and to eat the fruit of disappointment; or to do great evil, and to interfere with destiny, and then to eat the fruit of that? I tell you, San-fun-ho will light a flame too fierce for India; but in the West she may do some good; and the East may imitate the West, but the West will not imitate the East for many a year to come, being too proud and too full of energy.'

"And then I asked him: 'Who shall shield her in the West?' Lo, I have made these friends for her in India, that she may have a foundation to begin with when the time comes.'

"To which he answered: 'Is a dollar without friends? And is she less than a dollar? Moreover, there will come to you a man of her own race, who can serve her better than you when his turn comes. He will know less, but he will have the qualities she needs. Be on the watch for him, and when you think you have found him, put him to many tests.'

"So, as I told you, I took my *chela* into India, recovering the Jade, and making use of my mistakes for the testing of San-fun-ho, since even a man's mistakes are useful, if he has the will to conquer false pride. And you have seen, my son, that my *chela's* head was not turned, even though we traveled with great evidence of secret influence, which is a very subtle agent of corruption.

"You have seen how women broke the rules of caste to approach her; how men of high position trembled in her presence; how the crowd shouted to see more of her; how her voice stilled anger and turned violence into peace. Yet she was always my patient and obedient *chela*, was she not? And you shall see—at dawn tomorrow you shall see whether all that glamor of success has, or has not dimmed her character by as much as the mist of a man's breath on a mirror."

The lama looked at Ommony for a long time, repeatedly almost closing his eyes and then opening them suddenly, as if to catch some fleeting expression unawares.

"And when you came, my son, hiding in Chutter Chand's shop; when I knew the piece of the jade had reached your hands; when Benjamin sent word that you were spying on me; then it seemed to me that in spite of many faults you might be the man whom I must test. I have tested you in more ways than you guess, and I have seen all your faults, not least of which is a certain pride of righteousness. But San-fun-ho knows how to deal with that.

"Now think. Answer without self-seeking and without fear, truly. For I offer you my place, as San-fun-ho's protector and servant, to guard her that she may serve the world— My time has come to die."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE JADE OF ABOR

A man is what he is. He starts from where he is. He may progress, or he may retrogress. All effort in his own behalf is dead weight in the scale against him. All effort in behalf of others is a profit to himself; notwithstanding which, unless he first improve himself he can do nothing except harm to others. There is no power in the universe, nor any form of intercession that can separate a cause from its effect, action from reaction, or a man from retribution for his deeds.—From the Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

OMMONY sat still. Diana growled and chased some creature of imagination in her dreams. The lama threw wood on the fire, and watched it as if he were much more interested in the outcome of that than in what answer Ommony might make.

"What makes you think I could do it?" Ommony asked, vaguely and uncomfortably conscious that he was being invited to make himself the butt of half a world's ridicule, if of nothing worse.

"A flea—a mouse—a drop of water—a piece of wood—can do its duty," said the lama. "Is a man less?"

"I will do mine," said Ommony, "if I can see it. But—good ——, man!—how can I take *your* place?"

The lama blinked at him.

"She—and her companions—can go to India very easily, my son, without *you*. They are all provided for. They will never lack for money. It may be you are not the right man to be my *chela's* friend and in that case it is better for you, and for her, and for the world that you accept no burden you can not bear.

"Do not deceive yourself, my son. There will be no personal ease, no basking in the stupifying rays of flattery. You will be accused of all the evil motives that lurk in the minds of your accusers.

"Lecherous men will accuse you of lying when you say she is your niece; and you can not prove the relationship. Thieves will accuse you of theft. Ambitious men will denounce your ambition. Traitors will accuse you of treachery toward the human race. Bigots will charge you with unpatriotic scheming. Men of outwardly unblemished aspect, but whose secret thoughts are viler than the froth of cesspools, will accuse you of secretly immoral practices. They will leave you not a shred of reputation. They will try to impoverish you; they will try to prove you insane; they will try to put you in prison.

"And you will find here and there are men and women who will accept what San-fun-ho can teach. Some of those will be traitors, who will try to learn in order that they may set up themselves as teachers and accumulate money and fame. Those will be your most dangerous enemies.

"But some will be honest and steadfast, and they will encourage others; for the West is moving forward on a cycle of evolution; and moreover, it is growing very weary of its own creeds and politics and competition. It begins to be ready at last to put the horse before the cart, instead of the cart before the horse as hitherto.

"There is a great change coming—although this is Kali Yuga, and it is not wisdom to expect too much. The harvest takes care of itself—none knows how many generations hence. This is a time for the sowing of the seeds of thought on which a whole world's destiny depends. I have sown my handful. I can sow no more."

"What makes you so sure you are going to die?" asked Ommony.

"The Abors, my son, will attend to it; for I have broken their law. I made them promises, which I intend to break; I knew that I must, when I made the promises. There is that in me that blinded me to my other way out of the difficulty, and although I did my duty, that does not preserve me from the effects of wrong-doing.

"The Abors have their rights. This is their country. They protect this monastery and its secrets. They have protected me. Of my own free will I have availed myself of their protection and their law against admitting strangers.

"Do you remember Socrates, who broke the law of the Athenians, although he did his duty? He might have escaped after they condemned him, but he refused, although his friends insisted. And Socrates did well, my son; he had no right to avoid the consequences of his own acts; it was enough that he had told the Athenians some great truths, for he knew those truths, and it was the proper time to tell; if the Athenians had a law against telling the truth, that was their affair, not his.

"Socrates drank his poison, which was a simple little matter, and soon over with. Does it appear to you that the Athenians have even yet finished suffering from the injustice they inflicted?"

"But the Athenians could think. These Abors are mere savages," said Ommony.

"The Abors have their rights," the lama answered. "They work out their own destiny. I work out mine. If I had been a wiser man, less blinded by my lower nature, I could have found a better way to save my *chela* than by deceiving the Abors. But I *was* blind, so I took the only way I could. When I return to earth again, I am convinced I shall be less blind; and at least I shall owe no debt to the Abors, for I will pay it now."

"Why not leave all that to Destiny?" Ommony objected.

"My son, there is no other judge in whose hands I *can* leave it! But Destiny judges a man's unwillingness to pay, as surely as it judges his mistakes—as surely as it rewards his hidden motives and his honesty. There is no thought hidden from the Higher Law, and no escape from rebirth, time and time again, until each individual learns wisdom by experience.

"The Abors will learn wisdom, some sooner than others; but they will not learn it by being deprived of opportunity to use their own judgment. If they choose to kill me, they must inevitably suffer; but I would rather they should kill me than that they should have killed that child, and for more than one reason. They can do very little harm by killing me; the wrong will not amount to much, because I bear no resentment. If they had killed her, they would have robbed the world."

"But you have *your* rights, and you're worth more now than all the Abors put together!" Ommony objected.

The lama's eyes twinkled humorously.

"My son, you argue ignorantly, meaning well enough, but reckoning without the facts."

"For instance?"

"You would not understand. My course is necessary—never mind why, my son. It was entirely necessary for you to come to this place of your own free will; otherwise it would have been impossible for me to open your mind. I could have talked to you for ten years in India, and you would never have understood. But it was also necessary to provide for your admission to the valley, and for your safe return to India before I am dead.

"You were admitted because I gave my own life as hostage, saying they might slay me if you should ever escape from the valley alive. I did that, knowing they would slay me in any event, when they should learn that San-fun-ho and the others have left the valley forever. You see, my son, it is very necessary I should die, in order to consume as soon as possible the consequences of an untruth.

"As for the Abors: They are very ignorant, very faithful to their valley and their own law, very generous toward this monastery; it is better that they should kill me, than that they should be faithless to their laws and to their trust. I will do all I can to minimize the consequences for them."

A monk came in again with food, and once more the lama amused himself by feeding Diana.

"Make her do tricks," he insisted, and rewarded her with handfuls of food after each performance; he and the monk laughing as if it were the most interesting and amusing business in the world.

The sun had gone down over the mountains and there was a gloom within the chamber that affected Ommony's nerves, for it seemed to foretell tragedy, but the lama apparently had not a trouble on his mind. The moment the monk had gone Ommony began questioning:

"Does Elsa—I mean, does San-fun-ho know anything about your plans?"

"Enough, my son. A little. She understands she has a destiny. She understands she is to take you with her into India."

He rose to his feet, as if to avoid further conversation; but Ommony shot one more question at him:

"Does she know you expect to be killed?"

The lama did not answer. His wrinkled face became expressionless.

"Come," was all he said.

HE LED the way, in deepening gloom, along the wooden gallery that overhung the ravine, and through a door into the monastery, which appeared to be a patchwork nest of caves and buildings connected by passages hewn in the rock. Some of it appeared as old as time, but parts were medieval; some was almost modern. There was an air of economically conserved affluence and studied chastity of design—beauty everywhere, but less laid on than inherent in proportions and the almost exquisite restraint.

Pictures were hung on the plastered corridor walls at widely spaced intervals, apparently all drawn by the same hand. The lama stopped for a second in front of one of them, done in pastel on paper; a study of an eagle soaring, balancing himself to catch the uplift of the changing wind. It might have been done by a Chinaman a thousand years ago, it was so full of life, truth and movement and, above all, so superbly beautiful.

"My *chela!*" he said, and smiled, and passed on.

At one place, where the corridor turned at right angles and a lamp hung in chains from the ceiling, there was another pastel drawing, a portrait this one, of the lama himself.

"Wrinkles and all!" he said, chuckling.

He stood beside Ommony and studied the portrait for more than a minute; it seemed to amuse him as much as it astonished Ommony, who caught his breath.

"My ——!" Ommony exclaimed. "That's——"

"Yes," said the lama, chuckling. "That personality was my God once. It takes us long to learn. But San-fun-ho drew the picture, and I saw myself through the eyes of my *chela*, which was very interesting. Notice, my son, how affectionate she is, and yet how truthful. Not one hidden foolishness escapes her; and she sets it all down. Yet she is as gentle as the rain on dry hills."

He passed on, opened a door, glanced in, and motioned Ommony to enter.

"Schoolroom!" he said, and chuckled again, as if remembering a chain of incidents.

It looked about as much unlike a schoolroom as it would be easy to imagine. There was nobody in there, but it was lighted with kerosene lamps as if visitors were expected.

Across the full width of the room at one end was a stage, provided with curtain, footlights, wings and painted scenery. There were comfortable seats and small, square, solid tables on the floor for twenty or thirty people; and there was a gallery, at the end opposite the stage, for twenty or thirty more. The place was scrupulously clean and tidy.

"Life, my son, is drama. Why teach how to drug the mind, when the purpose of life is to render it alert and active? Shakespeare was right. You remember? 'All the world's a stage.' No learning is of any value unless we can translate it into action.

"Bad thoughts produce hideous action; right thinking produces grace and symmetry; and the audience is almost as important as the play. Let the child act the part of a villain, and it learns to strive to be a hero; let the hero's part be a reward for genuine effort, and lo! sincerity becomes the goal. There have been plays enacted here that would have thrilled Shakespeare to the marrow of his manhood. San-fun-ho wrote most of them."

"Who were the audience?" asked Ommony.

"Monks—Abors. The stupider the better. Let the actors strive to act so simply and sincerely that even monks and savages can understand. There have been plays acted on this stage that I think would have converted even Christian missionaries from the error of their own self-righteousness."

He led the way out again along the corridor, and now he began to hurry, striding with the regular, long movements of a mountaineer. He had suddenly thrown off fifty years again, in one of those strange resurrections of youth that seemed to sweep over him at intervals. Ommony, with Diana at his heels, had all he could do to keep pace.

However, there were pauses. He opened doors here and there along echoing corridors, giving Ommony a glimpse of rooms, each one of which had some connection with the beloved *chela*. There was a bedroom, as plain and almost as severely furnished as a monastery cell, only that every single item in it was as perfect as material and craftsmanship could contrive, and the proportions, the color, and something else that was indefinable, produced an atmosphere of unconditioned peace.

There was nothing out of place, and no unnecessary object in the room. The walls were pale daffodil-yellow; the Chinese rug was blue; the bed-spread was old-rose. There were flowers in a Ming vase on a small square table, but no other ornament.

"These walls will not forget her," said the lama. There was an agony within him, as his voice betrayed.

He led the way along a corridor, opening doors of rooms where the *chela's* companions had slept, making no comment. Those other rooms were more ornate than the *chela's* and vaguely, indefinably less beautiful; there was more furniture—less character—but tidiness and cleanliness beyond belief.

The monastery was honeycombed into a limestone mountain's heart. It was enormous. There was possibly accommodation for a thousand people, with perfect ventilation and no dampness, although how that was contrived did not appear.

Nor was there any sign of its inhabitants, nor any sound, except the shuffling of Ommony's loose shoes and the solid thump of the lama's bare feet as he strode with bowed head and the skirts of his long robe swinging.

They descended a long, hewn stairway presently and emerged, through a door a foot thick that was carved on both sides with dragons, into the open air. The rush and roar of water pouring into hollow caverns greeted them. They were now on that side of the monastery that Ommony had first seen, with the terraced amphitheatre below them, but it was too dark to peer into its depth; the stars blinked down above a rim of mountains.

"There will be a full moon," said the lama, apropos, apparently, of nothing.

He led down into the dark amphitheatre, by paths and steps that linked the circling terraces, and turned, midway, into a tunnel whose dark opening was like an ink blot in the shadow of rocks and trees.

Ten yards along the tunnel Ommony heard him fumbling with a lock; a door swung almost silently; the lama took him by the hand and pulled him forward, closing the door but not locking it. Then, in such utter darkness that all the senses were almost swallowed by it and Diana whimpered, the lama led, pauseless, holding Ommony's hand as if it were a child's. The old man's grip was like a swordsman's, as if his vanished youth, reborn for the moment, was burning him up; the strange thrill that was consuming him communicated itself to Ommony through the linked hands.

At the end of an immeasurable distance—there was no sense of time or space in that impenetrable darkness—they emerged into gloom under an oval patch of starlit sky, on a ledge, an incalculable distance down the inside of a limestone pit—somber, irregularly circular, enormous. The lama sat down on a mat that somebody had placed for him—signed—and Ommony sat down beside him.

"Let the dog not wander away. Bid her lie here," he said in a normal voice.

AS OMMONY'S eyes grew gradually used to the gloom he discerned that they were very near the bottom of the pit, whose almost perpendicular flanks rose so high that the stars appeared like bright dots on a dark-blue dome that rested on the summit. His own breathing seemed abominably noisy in the silence.

In front of where they sat there was a sheer drop, but the bottom did not seem to be more than fifty feet below; and somewhere in the midst of the almost circular space into which he gazed there was an object, bulky, of no ascertainable shape, and apparently raised on a platform of rock so as to be almost on a level with the ledge on which they sat. Diana lay still, sniffing, one ear raised; there were humans not far away.

Presently there was a sound below—apparently a footstep, and Diana growled at it. A lantern appeared, but it was impossible to tell whether the individual who carried it was man or woman. There were several more footsteps, and one word in a clear voice, instantly recognizable—the *chela's*.

There began to be a prodigious fantom movement in the gloom. Something—a great black cloth apparently—was pulled by many hands and the shape of the object in the center changed. The lantern light was reflected in a sea-green pin-point that spread and increased as moonlight spreads on water, but much more fiery, and full of weird movement.

The lantern suddenly went out, but the peculiar green glow had made such an impression that with his eyes shut, Ommony could still see evolving, glowing green.

"What is it?" he asked.

"The Jade of Abor."

The lama's voice was solemn. He seemed almost to resent the question. However, he went on speaking in a low voice:

"That fragment, that was broken off and stolen by an Abor, has been set back, but there is none nowadays who knows how to heal the break. There is a blemish. Thus one ignorant fool can spoil the product of a thousand wise men's labor. But that Abor was no better, and no worse than they who ruin reputations, to possess an hour's self-righteousness.

"Others, who should know better, will try to break my *chela's* spirit when the time comes—some for their own amusement, some for profit, some because they hate the truth. But she is made of stronger stuff than stone."

His self-control was not so perfect as it had been. The last few words were in a tone of voice that fought with overwhelming sadness. He grew rigid in an effort at self-mastery, then relaxed and went on speaking:

"My son, remember this: the highest motive is of no avail without proportion and a sense of fitness; because those are the life of wisdom. Time is a delusion. All is the eternal Now. But in a world in which all is delusion, of which time is a controlling element, there is a proper time for all things.

"To discern the right time, and to act precisely then, is as important as the knowledge *how* to act. But discernment does not come by reason of desire; it comes by observation of essential truths—as that the sun, the moon, the stars, the seasons and the tides keep their appointed path, and when they fail there is disaster. This is an appointed time. Mark well."

The somber silence and the ragged flanks of the pit, that towered upward through a million shapeless shadows to the star-pierced oval summit, combined to inspire dread—but of what? Ommony could feel Diana trembling.

The lama spoke again after a long pause as dispassionately as a big clock ticking in the dark—asserting measured, elemental facts.

"Remember. Remember each word, my son. I speak with death not far from me. At dawn the Abors go to the northern end of the valley, by the Tsango-po falls, to await my coming. At noon I meet them."

He was silent for many minutes. Not until the silence had grown almost unendurable did he go on speaking.

"Lest the Abors harm themselves by slaying more than me, who am responsible, I have sent into Tibet all but a few of my monastery people. At noon I will try to reach agreement with the Abors, that if they slay me, for having broken their law, they shall permit the others to return to the monastery, and a new lama to be sent to hold authority.

"But as to the outcome of that I know nothing. It may be that the Jade must be hidden by the Tsango-po waters. There is a time for all things; it is not my province to know the time for that; there are others whose province it is."

He stared into the dark in front of him. When he spoke again, at the end of five minutes, his voice sounded almost as if he had left his body and were speaking to it and to Ommony.

"Remember every word. Those few, who have remained, are chosen men, who know the secret way. They will take you into India—you, San-fun-ho and all the European *chelas* to Tilgaun—the Tibetan *chelas* into Tibet by the route that leads through Sikhim, because *they* have a destiny that they can best fulfil in Tibet."

Followed another tense silence, broken by the long-drawn howl of an animal somewhere on the ledges half a mile above them. It sounded lonelier than the wail of a forgotten soul.

"I am not the guardian of Hannah Sanburn. Even as you and I, my son, she governs her own destiny. But she is good. No harm can come if she should leave Tilgaun, because she has done her work there, and it is another's turn.

"There is one who will take my place as trustee; he will present himself; I have written his appointment. There is one who will take her place; perhaps she is that one at whose house you were in Delhi; but that is Hannah Sanburn's business. There is one who will take your place; but that is *your* affair.

"No man is indispensable. He who clings to the performance of a duty when the work is done and another waits to carry evolution forward, is as the fungus on the living tree. He rots. The tree rots under him."

SILENCE again. A wedge of silver, creeping down the western side of the pit, dispersed the shadows and threw great fangs of limestone into high relief; but that was very far above them. Where they sat it seemed darker than ever.

"Remember every word, my son. I speak in the portal of death. I do *not* say that Hannah Sanburn shall go with you to the West. That may, or it may not be. I *do* say, tarry not in Tilgaun; because this is an appointed time. Three of the lesser *chelas* will go with San-fun-ho to the West. Let *her* select them. Let the others stay in Tilgaun, where as much awaits them as they have the character to do."

The beast in the dark loneliness above them howled again. Ommony sat watching the forerunner of the moonlight chasing shadows down the pit-side—wondering.

After nearly a quarter of a century in India he and Hannah Sanburn would be almost as much strangers in the West as San-fun-ho would be.

"There is a fitness in all things and a time for all things," said the lama, as if he had read Ommony's mind. "But a great faith is required, and a sincerity that like the temper of the steel turns faith into impenetrable armor. Hannah Sanburn has nobility. It may be, she may help you to serve San-fun-ho.

"But beware, my son, of the snare of personality. If ye two seek to serve each other, ye are like the two sides of a triangle that has no base, nor any purpose. But if ye both serve San-fun-ho, and she the world, the triangle is perfect."

He paused again, then slowly turned his head and looked into Ommony's eyes. His own were like blue jewels burning in the dark.

"Without you," he said, "or without her, San-fun-ho will find others. She is my *chela*, and I know the power that is in her. But beware of being false! Better for you never to have been born! Better to die ten thousand deaths than to betray her through self-seeking! Let her alone, my son, unless you can follow all the way!

"Then, if she should lead you wrong, that will be her affair; in after lives *you* will have the karma of sincerity, and *she* the fruit of false teaching—if she *should* teach falsely—But I know my *chela*. She will lead upward, as an eagle, and all the enemies of light will spread their nets for her in vain!"

As he ceased speaking the whole western wall of the gigantic pit became suffused in silver, as the moon's edge crossed the eastern rim. Wan, scrawny crags of limestone yearned like frozen ghosts toward the light. The pit's awful nakedness lay revealed, its outlines dimmed in shadow, as mysterious, as silent and as measureless as the emotion born of gazing.

Suddenly, as the moon's disk appeared, there shone a green light in the midst of the pit—a light that swirled as if in moving water, and increased in size, as if it multiplied itself within the substance it had touched.

It grew into a pool—a globe—a sphere—an ovoid mass of liquid green light, all in motion, transparent, huge — afloat, it seemed, in black precipitated silence, two, or perhaps three hundred feet away. Slowly, very slowly, it became apparent that the egg-shaped, glowing mass was resting on seven upright stones, of the same color as itself, that were set beneath it on a platform of dark rock that rose exactly in the middle of the pit.

As the full moon floated into view the enormous Jade so caught the light that it seemed to absorb all of it. And suddenly a figure stood before the livid Jade—a girl's; she was the Gretchen-girl, with whom Ommony had spoken on the night when he first saw San-fun-ho's companions on the stage.

She was draped in white, but the stuff glowed green in the Jade's reflection, and as she peered into the enormous stone she held the end of the loose drapery across the

lower portion of her face, like a shield, with her elbow forward. She gazed for about a minute, and then disappeared. Another took her place.

"It is only San-fun-ho who dares to look into the Jade for long," said the lama solemnly. "It shows them all the horror of their lower selves. *They* look by moonlight. *They* must drape themselves, for they have much to overcome, and there is magic in the Jade. None but my *chela*—none but San-fun-ho—dares to face it in the full light of the sun."

One by one the seventeen girls appeared, looked deep into the Jade, and vanished into darkness.

"They are not bad," said the lama. "Not bad, my son. There are not so many better women. Do you dare to look?"

But Ommony sat still.

"Better so," said the lama. "In curiosity there is no wisdom. He who can not look enough to see his higher nature shining through the lower, had better have seen nothing."

There commenced a chant of women's voices, rising from the fathomless darkness below the Jade. It began by being low and almost melancholy, but changed suddenly into faster tempo and a rising theme of triumph, ending in a measured march of glory. There was no accompaniment, no drumbeat, but the final phrases pulsed with power, ending on a chord that left imagination soaring into upper realms of splendor.

Then in silence the girls emerged out of the black night as if they had been projected by a magic lantern. No sound of footfall or of breathing reached across the intervening gap as, with restraint that told of strength in hand and limitless lore of rhythm, they danced their weaving measure seven times around the Jade, as lovely to the eye as Grecian figures, cut in cameo on green and conjured into life. It was sheer, spiritual magic.

There was not a wasted motion, not a step but symbolized the ordered, infinitely beautiful evolving of a universe; and as they passed behind the glowing Jade their figures seemed to swim within the stone, as if they were nymphs afloat in moonlit water. But there was no sign yet of San-fun-ho.

"They shall remember this night" said the lama.

The fire within the Jade grew dim and died as the moon's edge passed beyond the crags. The girls vanished in black darkness.

"And so, you have seen the Jade. Few have seen that," said the lama. "And you will find that there are very few who will believe you have seen it; but that is no harm, because *most* of those who would believe are merely credulous, of the sort who hunt miracles and seek to make themselves superior by short cuts. Whereas there are no short cuts, and there is no superiority of the sort they crave, but only a gradual increase of responsibility, which is attained by stern self-mastery."

SUDDENLY a voice came from the pit beneath them, clear and confident—the *chela's*:

"O Tsiang Samdup!"

The lama answered with a monosyllable, his body rigid with emotion. His dim outline was like an eagle's startled from his eerie in the night.

"O Tsiang Samdup, the Abors have come for a conference. They ask for word with you."

"Cover the Jade," he answered.

There was presently a phantom movement, shapeless and billowy, as if a huge black cloth were being hauled back into place; and then the rain came, softly, steadily, until the air grew full of music made by little cataracts that splashed from rock to rock.

The lama sighed and, for a moment, his outline seemed to shrink as old age claimed him, but he threw that off and stood up, motioning to Ommony to move back under shelter of the rock.

"Wait there," he commanded, and vanished.

Ommony could hear him climbing down into the darkness—and presently two voices as he talked in low tones with the *chela*. Then silence, for a very long time, only broken by the music of the rain and a wierd wind sighing on the upper ledges—until wind and rain ceased and there was only the tinkle of dripping water.

The dog crept close to Ommony for warmth, shivering at the loneliness. Ommony tried to memorize the lama's conversation. He had almost forgotten the Jade. It was nothing as compared to the tremendous issues that the lama dealt in. Thought groped in an unseen future.

The sensation was of waiting on the threshold of a new world—waiting to be

born. The past lost all reality. The world he had known—war, selfishness, corruption—was a nightmare, wrought of hopelessness and full of useless aims.

The future? It was his—his own—immensely personal to him. He was about to be born again into the old world, but with an utterly new consciousness of values. He knew he had a duty in the world; but he could not formulate it, would not know how to begin, only knew it was immensely dark and silent on the threshold.

The lama's voice broke silence, speaking to the *chela* somewhere in the pit below:

"The first duty of a *chela* is obedience!"

Silence again. Not even wind or rain to break the stillness. At last the lama's figure, like a shadow issuing from nothing, approaching along the ledge and sitting down near him—but not near enough for conversation. Then, after a very long pause, the *chela's* voice, resonant and clear from somewhere in the distance:

"O Tsiang Samdup! I obey. And *they* obey *me*. May I wait until the dawn? It is not long."

The lama gave assent—one monosyllable—then groaned, and came and sat closer to Ommony.

"My work is done," he said. "There is a limit to endurance."

He glanced up at the sky, but there was no sign yet of dawn.

A low chant came from the distance, almost like the humming of a swarm of bees, but the lama took no notice of it.

"She will go with you, thinking I come later. You may tell her in Tilgaun, and she will understand. She will be brave then. She will not forget she was my *chela*."

There was only the sound of humming after that until the crags around the rim of the great pit grew faintly luminous before the coming of the dawn, and the stars grew paler.

Then the hum swelled into song, whose music sounded like the mystic evolution of new worlds; they were all girls' voices, thrilling with courage and exultation. Ommony strained his ears to catch the words, but the distance was too great. Somehow, although he could not penetrate the darkness, he felt as if a veil were lifting.

The song ceased, and in the hush that followed Tsiang Samdup rose to his feet.

"I go," he said quietly. "I am old, my son. I cannot bear to say good-by to my beloved *chela*. May the gods, who guard your manhood, give you strength and honesty to serve her. She will ask for me. You may say to her: 'The first duty of a *chela* is obedience.' "

He turned into the tunnel, walking swiftly, and was gone. A silver bell rang, over in the distance, opposite, seven times, slow and distinct; then a pause, in which the overtones spread off into infinity; then seven times again. And as the last note faded into silence, dawn touched the crags with silver and the *chela's* voice rose solemnly, entoning the oldest invocation in the world:

"O my Divinity, blend Thou with me—that out of darkness I may go forth in light."

The dawn spread swiftly down the crags until it touched a ledge on which the *chela* stood, and all beneath that was darkness, like a pool of ink. Her right hand was raised. The other girls, beneath her, were invisible. Morning glistened on her face.

Her lips moved and her breast swelled as she drew breath to intone the Word. And then, in chorus from the mist and darkness that enwrapped her feet, and from her own lips, came the magic, long-drawn syllable that has been sacred since before Atlantis sank under the ocean and new races explored new continents—the Word that signifies immeasurable, absolute, unthinkable, all-compassing, forever infinite and unattainable, sublime and holy essence—the beginning and the end.

"O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-om-m-m-m-m——"

It rose, and rose, and died away among the crags, until the last reverberation echoed faintly from the upper levels and there came an answer to it, sonorous and strong, in a man's voice, from a crag beside a cave mouth three hundred feet above the ledge where Ommony stood, nearly midway between him and the *chela*.

"O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-om-m-m-m-m!"

The lama raised his right hand in a final benediction, turned into the cave, and vanished. Then came the *chela's* voice calling to Ommony as the dawn sank deep into the pit, revealing her companions grouped on a ledge below:

"Gupta Rao—change your name now! Wait for me. I come—for Tsiang Samdup sends us forth together!"

THE END

Author of "Out of Date," "A Border Raid," etc.

THEY had just come from the outer sea, where it boiled in patches marking the rising fish shoals. They were heavily laden, each with a full catch, beating in to the cliffs with all sail set, as it were. Not that they were boats, they were gulls, kittiwake gulls, which fact they called out to all the world in chorus at forty-second intervals.

"*Ki-i-ti-wake! Ki-ti-ya-wake!*" they cried, and the cry was taken up by the watchers on the nests along the cliffs. Thus does the successful fishing flock hail back to port.

Then, as if the clamor had called it, there climbed swiftly up out of the horizon —where jade-green sea met fat, round-shouldered, white clouds—a raking, clipper-built bird.

He came at the speed of an express train, keen, hawk-like, and inquisitive, ruling a straight line toward the fishing flock with the air of one having business of a sinister and private nature.

He was cut on pirate lines, that bird, with long, slashing, narrow wings, a gull's beak villainously hooked as to the tip, and heavily armed, webbed feet. His color was the color of a storm cloud, ashen above, and dull, smoky-white beneath. As a pirate flaunts the grim black flag, so he carried the two center feathers of his black tail reversed, turned upward, and quite four inches longer than the rest. In this he was unlike all the sea birds, so none could mistake him; there was no deception, rather an insolent display of his true colors, in which presumably he gloried.

His official and full title was the pomatorhine skua, and his nearest relations were the sea-gulls. The skuas, the initiated will tell you, are as much like the pirates of old as birds can be.

Then a hush fell over the cliffs, a silence over the deep, and all eyes—those keen bird eyes, so bright and clear—were turned to watch him that came. There could be no mistake, they made none; that tail they saw, and seeing, knew.

The fishers increased their speed, but fish weigh heavy, and they carried each a full gorge. He that came was in ballast, so to speak, and overhauled them at every wing stroke. But, even as he shot above them, they fell as one bird to the water, and he, fetching one superb curve, fell, too.

Nothing happened. The fishing flock, riding low with furled wings like a fleet at anchor, bunched close and said nothing. The skua, riding high and all alone, made no remark. The watchers on the cliffs uttered no word. Only the sea undulated shoreward in oily, following heaves, and went to pieces with a crash at the foot of the cliffs; and very far away on the moors beyond the cliffs, a golden plover called plaintively—

"*Peet, peet, peet, peet.*"

At the end of fifteen minutes three kittiwakes, losing patience, one presumes, got up and panicked to shore, and the skua was up ere they had taken five wing-beats. One was not so much conscious that he was up

as that he was above the gulls, was among them in a flash.

The watchers heard his savage scream, saw the flock rise and burst asunder. Something fell. A bar of silver, was it? No—a fish. One gull had disgorged a fish.

The miracle that followed brought forth screams, not of admiration—though it was most admirable—but of annoyance.

Following the bar of silver fell a second, and a larger, darker bar. It was the skua, with closed wings, tightened feathers, clenched beak, and he fell as a stone falls. Heavier than the fish, he overtook it six feet above the water—it was a matter of seconds anyway—caught it, flung out his wings and tail, slanted, and with the impetus of the fall rocketed, hissing, a hundred and fifty feet up into the air again, where he came to, as it were, and hung rocking, like a kite, on still pinions. That was one marvel. This was the other and greater—it had all happened while a man might count ten.

The raider then removed himself, without a single wing-flap, to the cliffs, where he fed on the booty.

Once the sound as of gigantic swords whirled through the heavens announced the passage of the mighty whooper swan. Once a sea-eagle, with a white tail and a disconcerting stare, sailed by upborne on wings that were a picture; and once something laughed like a maniac overhead, which the skua knew was a great northern diver, who was not afraid of him—or any other bird, for that matter.

About this time he became aware of eyes, gleaming, animal-like eyes, fixed intently upon him from the fastness of a black cleft.

He finished his meal—so little it was for one to whom fifty miles at a flight was a matter of no account—and went to investigate the owner of those eyes. He was met by a beak. That in itself was not remarkable. He was generally received with beaks wherever he went, being one of those characters that it is not safe to receive in any other fashion.

This beak, however, would have belonged to a parrot in any other but this arctic country. As it was, it was colored with all the colors of the rainbow, and gave forth sounds, unkind sounds, which did not appear quite safe. When it came out, which it did very suddenly and venomously, the skua saw that it belonged to a puffin, a tub of a bird with a very stout heart.

THEN he removed to a loch, which was a lake, which was more or less water, guarded by immemorial hills, filled with acres of reeds singing a song of their very own, and freckled with islets, which in their turn were freckled with seapinks, and might have been the haunt of fairies if they had not been given over to birds instead.

Thus it was in summer, such a short summer. But in winter? Not even the birds remain to see what it is like in winter, for this was Europe on her northern face, where she looks out for ever at the North Pole. This was the land where the birds came to nest; the dim, mysterious, untrodden north; Nature's hatching-ground for half the birds of a continent.

Here the skua prospected for a time—he was not received with enthusiasm—and intercepted a small, brown bird who seemed all wing. He was returning from business connected with the commissariat department. He was called a knot, though who gave him that odd name, and why, goodness alone knows.

This bird saw the dread, reversed, black tail-feathers afar off, and, being anxious to keep them afar off, went up and went out in the clouds. The skua, who was nothing if not a master of flight, followed till he looked no more than a speck of dust.

What happened up there in the domed void is known only to the two birds concerned; but they returned. The knot came first. At least he appeared suddenly quite near the ground, though human eyes could not have marked the falling of him.

After the knot came a thin, black streak, which checked suddenly where the knot had checked, and turned into the skua. Then followed some wonderful sleight-of-wing feats, which ended quite abruptly with the knot piping derision from the reeds, where he had gained safety by some miraculous trick of flight, and the skua sitting calmly on the water as if he had been there for the last hour.

Queer things, birds. They shift about the map at the speed of forked lightning one second, and the next second sit as unemotional and motionless as stones.

An hour later our skua cast up in a place where the shallow sea had lost itself among sand and close-shaven rocks, long grass, and general waste and desolation. I do not know the extent of that place, but binoculars

would not have discovered the end of it, and it belonged apparently to all the birds of all the world, and their united voices were like unto the voice of a rough sea on a flat shore.

Here were swans, all three species; and wild geese after their kind; and duck, Heaven knows how many species; and whimbrel on stilt legs and with beaks sickle-shaped; and plover with waistcoats of black; and ruffs with head-dresses like Zulu chiefs; and small waders swarming like flies; and gulls in legions, from the snow-white and rose-ivory gull and the giant, white glaucous gull, boasting six feet across the wings, down to the small, common English gulls. All of them were much concerned for the welfare of their young, and the skua passed across this place swiftly, for fear the inhabitants should arise in bulk and mob him.

Suddenly he flung up, so to speak, tacked and hung in the wind. A small, bluish beast was trotting along dog-fashion under shelter of some rocks. He seemed about to do something—he had a furtive look—rob some one, or mayhap commit murder or something equally exciting. And the skua, who recognized in him an arctic fox and knew the reputation of the breed, thought he might be worth watching.

Presently he dropped into a hollow and went from sight, and the skua still waited. Perhaps he knew what was coming. He looked as if he did.

When the fox appeared again he was coming back, carrying something very gingerly and gently in his mouth, as a retriever carries a wounded partridge. This burden of the fox's was no wounded partridge, however, but a gull's egg, a big one.

He came on at his steady dog-trot, grinning from ear to ear as only a fox can, quite forgetting to look up—animals very rarely look up. If he had, he would have seen the skua, anchored head to wind, waiting his chance. This would have made a difference to him, and to the bird—but no matter.

In time he came to a place where the flat-cheeked rock was cracked. It was not easy to get at that place, even for so nimble a footpad as himself, being cut off by a small but efficient morass. Here in the cleft, hidden in a natural store all of his own, he hid his egg and departed. And the keen, penetrating eyes of the bird noted every movement.

Anon the fox returned with a young eider duck—a mere fluffy ball of down—quite dead, and, placing it with the egg, departed yet again. He was laying up his winter hoard.

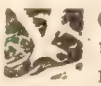
Down came the skua. Into the cleft he thrust his long, hooked beak, and out came the egg. This was finished in a few seconds, and he was just starting on the youthful eider duck that had been, when something snarled behind him.

There was a vision of upflung forepaws, wide jaws and suggestive fangs as the fox sprang up over the bleached rock.

Now it is a handicap of all the great fliers that they rise from the ground slowly; only your short-winged bird jumps off with a flying start, so to speak. The skua, whose profession demanded a cool head and ready thought, saw in a flash that those fangs would reach him before he could get under way and, seeing, acted.

It seemed as if he bent forward and flung out his beak. The motion was strangely suggestive of a snake striking, so quick, so sure, so absolutely without warning. A lightning lunge, with an odd twist at the end. And the fox stopped. That was all. He stopped.

After a little, when the skua was a melting blotch on the horizon, the fox walked slowly round several times, as one who has run his head against a brick wall. He had not, but it was a mere fluke that he had not, lost an eye as well as his senses for a few seconds in that argument.



ONE of the penalties of being able to make "of the heavens a high-road, and the sea a market-place," is that he is forced to eat like fury to balance the enormous expenditure of energy. A bird is all energy; it lives in the very utmost sense of the word, and consequently is consumed with a mighty hunger. It must gorge to fly, and must fly to live.

This lucid statement may explain what the skua was doing only ten minutes after, loafing round an islet in this same land of desolation inhabited solely by geese. There may have been ten geese and ten ganders here, all very short in their tempers.

The raider sat on an outcrop of sand and stared blankly at the North Pole, deaf to the maledictions hurled upon him by the owners of the place. A gander flounced at him open-beaked, hissing far worse than any snake, and he lifted light as thistledown on

buoyant wings. Then the gander went away, and the raider returned to his perch.

This sort of thing went on for half an hour till the ganders retired in disgust, and everybody forgot about the somber, brooding figure on the sand spur, and the business of the place, the comings and the goings, the gabblings and the conversation of "*sib-sib-sib*" and "*grog-grog-grog*" which is the wild goose's way of talking scandal, went on as usual.

The ganders spread abroad, sheepwise, grazing, and gabbling as they grazed. The geese came up from, or went down to the water with their families, stopping by the way to say things to other geese; and the young, waddling and paddling, frolicked even up to the hard, strong legs of the motionless skua.

He, that raider, said nothing, and moved not so much as a feather. Only, as he stared straight down his long, murderous beak, he very solemnly and very slowly closed and opened one eye. It may have been a wink he was exchanging with Fate, or it may not. Anyway in the game of hazard he played always with Fate he looked like winning another throw.

Somebody shouted suddenly or screamed or fluttered, or did something equally futile. Every broad-beaked head, mounted each on a long neck, shot up from the half-alive, wiry grass, and looked one way—toward the noise of the scuffle.

Something was happening on the outcrop of sand. The skua, which till then had been a statue merely, was struggling with something under his feet which utterly refused to keep quiet, and half a dozen goslings were beating a hasty, half-running, half-flapping, more than half-stumbling, retreat. One little fellow in his hurry had fallen on his breast, and lay kicking and crying for help frantically.

The ganders came back with a rush that made the foam fly. Every goose threw herself with spread wings above her young; every goose, that is, save one. She was executing a double-quick slide, between a run and a fly, to the outcrop of land, and she was speechless.

Her speed, for so ungainly a fowl, was a miracle, no less. Quicker than the gander she sped; quicker even than her own mate, whose sickle wings were already bearing him to the spot clear of the ground. You see, she was the mother of that thing which was mixed up with the skua's legs.

The change in the raider was startling. From apathy he jumped to high-pressure action. It was touch and go, and he knew it; for between his claws was a gosling. If he could not quieten the little fat one swiftly, quieten it enough to carry it off, the game was up, and, ah——

The goose was on him like a whirlwind, and a goose taken that way is no trifle; she expects no quarter, and gives none. Pivoting clean round, the skua faced her. Butcher he was, but no coward; his worst enemies could not call him that.

He made some lightning-flash play with his beak. He did something very quickly. And the goose staggered as if she had received a bullet full on the chest. It was no bullet, but the skua's bill, which for the moment was much the same thing.

She staggered momentarily, with a working portion of the wind knocked out of her. It was but a matter of half a dozen seconds anyway before she recovered. It was enough, however. In that space the skua was up—his strenuous wings whistled like steel—and the gosling was with him. Then, if ever, all the speed and power of wing which Nature had given him to defy tempests, and—eh—living tempests, was needed, every ounce of it.

He knew his opponents, knew that the gander had already got up speed; that the goose was not likely to dally; heard the *whew-whew-whew* of their wings, and the hissing that meant murder if he were caught; and that gosling must have been well fed; his weight did not help matters.

If you can picture the flight of a pirate schooner, heavily laden with plunder, before two large, towering, but well-armed merchant ships, you will in some measure be able to picture the flight of that skua across that No Man's Land, where half the birds of a continent were spread to watch. It was a great chase, with a life to sell either way.

He was conscious of a roar, like unto the roar of a gale in a forest of stripped trees. He saw out of the corner of his eye a cloud suck upward behind him after the fashion of a waterspout; and he knew by these tokens that he had roused the entire community, or as much of it as lay in his path. He was also very painfully aware of the nearness on his right rear of the ceaseless,

quick whimper of the gander's wings, and took no comfort from the knowledge.

Then Fate in the shape of a white-tailed sea-eagle played into his hands by dropping out of nowhere and stopping one of the ganders in full flight. This happened just behind him. He only heard it happen, and guessed the rest.

He saw a white bar come down from the heavens on his left, however, and saw a goose go out of life in a puff of feathers. That, he knew, was a Greenland falcon at his work. The falcon had, as a matter of fact, been waiting and watching for that chance half the day.

The confusion which followed can not be described in words. It is beyond the power of brush; beyond imagination even. The whole ground, for half a square mile, seemed to get up and fly about, and the raider took advantage of it to retire coyly into the horizon, thanking his flight-feathers that he had not been retired from life instead. And the gosling afforded a very fine meal.

IT WAS some hours later and near the day's end, though that makes little difference in the far northern summer, when the raider located the camp of the tern people. They had pegged down their claim on the sand dunes, and held it in partnership with the black-headed gulls.

He heard them long before he saw them; and, if one judged by sound alone, they were birds of low degree. The colony lived in a perpetual uproar—everybody quarreling with everybody else for no reason at all.

They were different to look at, however; very different. He saw them at first through an amber haze, white and gray flashes, streaks and circles against—he was flying above, remember—a background of golden sand and pale-green sea. They might have been magnified gray-and-white swallows with black heads, but they were impetuous beyond any swallow, excitable past belief, straining, impatient, fretful, highly strung to a degree.

The keen-eyed pirate bird steadied his wings and dawdled with the breeze. There might be a chance here, or—such things had been known—he might even make one.

They were fishing. They were always fishing. Very dainty they looked with their knife-like wings, and shapely, sharply forked tails. Very quick they were also, like intense flashes of light, and he wondered as he came to anchor, so to speak, on a dune, if he were capable of making one "bail up."

He was all the time keenly searching for their young. They must have young somewhere. He knew that; but it is not given to any one to discover the young of terns after they are a few days old. They are there, and yet they are not there. Goodness and their dainty mothers alone know the secret of that hiding. It is as if they had the power of invisibility.

This annoyed the skua. He was by way of being an expert in the finding of young birds and eggs. It was his profession, or part of it; the other part was that which followed.

He rose and loafed seaward above the fishers, humming a tune as it were and, to look at, entirely unaware of them. That was part of the game. He never once looked directly at a fisher, only he regarded them sidewise, and he marked who had a full catch and who failed.

The terns were plunging down and going clean under like plummets, but the black-headed gulls waited for the shoals to rise.

Suddenly every gull sat plump down on the water with a *plash*, and he knew, by the same token, that he was recognized. No skua can attack a gull unless the gull is flying, and the attacked one seems to be as well aware of the fact as the pirate himself.

Followed a prolonged pause, and after the pause a keen, sharp-beaked bird with a white keel and a black back, bobbed up out of the depths, as if it were a fish and had been living down there. That bird was a guillemot, and he carried two fish in his beak, and he alone knew how many more farther down.

Then suddenly, without any sort of warning to explain the miracle, the sea was given over to these birds. They bobbed up everywhere, fluttering and jerking in a spurt of spray. One moment they were not, the next they were—in hundreds.

When one of them rose on quick, stubby wings to go home, the others followed and met the skua, who dropped lightly a hundred feet or so and screamed a rancorous, suggestive scream much too close above them. If he expected a general disgorging of fish he must have been annoyed not a little at what followed.

The whole flock fell like a cartload of stones, turning tails up and showing like a

shower of silver sparks. A hundred bursts of spray shot up, and a smother of falling water followed, and those guillemots went out as a picture is erased from a slate. And the winged pirate swept over the place where they had been with an enraged yell that made the floating gulls duck their heads and glance anxiously toward the shore.

Long after, those gulls swam ashore and, by dint of much stealth, found their nests.

It was while the skua stood asleep on one leg at the very extreme point of a sand spur thrust toothlike into the sea, that he became aware of eyes regarding him from the water. Something, some intuition, must have awakened him, for there was no sound beyond the eternal snarl and whisper of the waves and the distant clamor of the bird hosts.

It is not a nice thing to be steadily stared at by large animal eyes which seem to belong to the cold, heaving, green sea and to nothing else. What lay behind those eyes only the water knew, and the water would not say.

The skua opened one keen orb and regarded the eyes with that expressionless stare peculiar to all birds. Half a second may have elapsed between the opening of the other eye and the opening of both wings, just as quickly as ever in his life he unfurled those vast air-sails of his.

Suddenly he lifted with a hurried, mad, strenuous flapping, about three feet. It was all he could do in the time allowed, and the time allowed was nothing at all worth speaking about. A huge, bloated, snorting mass, reeking of fish, shot past underneath far up the slope of sand and came to a halt on its nose and with a roar, and the sand yawned as sand does when water has been suddenly thrown upon it.

It was a seal, a gray seal, and a male to boot, and the same is a death trap to such a one as the skua.

TWELVE hours later, in a damp, blanketing, dumb fog, the skua was sighted by the duck colony. Let there be no mistake, this was no small gathering of what we call wild duck. It was a city, mustering thousands of nests, and the ducks were of the sea, wild-looking wanderers of the waste, haunters of wind and wave, land and tempest-harried shores. Here were the pochard, and the scoters, black as night, scaups and tufted duck, and great, long-necked, heavy, velvet scoters. The water was alive with them; the shore crawled with duck.

The skua was upon this colony without warning, thanks to the fog; dropping out of nowhere, and seizing—before one could cry "Murder!"—a scaup baby.

"Pomatorhine skua! By Jove! Let him have it. Full plumage, too."

The voice came from behind a clump of rushes, and something gleamed, an unmistable, bar-like gleam that can be made only by a gun or rifle barrel. In the sickly sun dribbling through the fog, there was enough to see that.

Luckily the skua was still under way, had not yet ceased gliding. His head jerked round on the instant, and in the same instant his simitar wings came down with a whistle. There was no pause between his upward spring and his falling headlong sidewise, letting himself down a couple of feet and hurling madly into the mist.

The young naturalist behind the gun, one of an expedition of collectors, was a good shot. His aim was true. The shots went where he meant them to go, but they did not stop the skua. That odd little yank in mid-air, that dropping as if the skua were on the end of a string, had done the trick; and the fog did the rest.

The skua went away quite quickly, and far enough. If, however, you let off two barrels of a twelve bore not more than twenty yards behind a pomatorhine skua, and he learns, for the second time in his life, how it feels to listen to lead shot whimpering about masterless, he is likely to break away and lose control of himself like a bolting horse.

This may or may not explain why he ran into a dumb, black bank of fog that would have made any ship's captain swear himself blue.

It was like charging at fifty miles an hour into a mountain of well-soaked cotton wool. And the collision which followed was no less violent for that reason.

The skua stopped with a jerk that seemed to drive the quills of his tail through the nape of his neck, and he felt as if every bone in his neck had been separately and suddenly broken.

He was conscious of a huge, white wing locked lovingly in his own pinion, and of having his head screwed sidewise into a white-feathered body. Also there was a

scream, one scream only, and it was quite enough. No innocent throat emitted that deadly yell.

Then he fell, head over tail and backward, through an endless sea of treble thick fog, without bottom, or so it seemed. After many years of falling—in reality it could not have been many seconds—a sand dune shot up and hit him on the head.

Then the terrifying silence and stillness rose up and engulfed him, and he knew no more.

Three hours later a retriever belonging to that young naturalist salvaged from a fog bank overhanging some sand dunes the crumpled body of a very fine pomatorhine skua first, and the equally blasted and quite as fine carcass of a white Greenland falcon after.

"By Jove!" said the young naturalist. "They must have fallen a thousand feet."

Which they had. But he did not know how or why. A monstrous glaucous gull, the color of virgin ivory, alone knew that—he was passing at the time and told me of it later.

"AFRICAN GOLF" AMONG THE INDIANS

by **Arthur Woodward**

THE far famed "African golf," galloping dominoes," "craps," or, in other words, plain, ordinary dice, existed in one form or another among one hundred and thirty tribes belonging to thirty linguistic stocks of the North American Indians.

The game is one dating back to the dim borderland of the pre-historic era. Graves in Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona that were old when Caesar ruled have given up small dice in various forms.

The dice used by the different tribes are manufactured from a wide variety of materials and are of every shape, size and color.

They are made of wood, bone, shell, stone, pottery disks, ivory, peach and plum pits, beaver and woodchuck teeth, walnut shells, corn seeds, beans, split cane and brass.

All Indians, men and women, are inveterate gamblers. However, unlike our games of chance, many of the Indian games have some ceremonial and religious significance and are played only at certain times.

Others are played as we play them, for amusement and as the dough boy of the A. E. F. played, for "*boo koo* jack."

Indians have been known to gamble away everything they owned including their wives and their lives, which is raising the White Man's ante to a considerable degree.

As a rule, Indian dice have but two sides that are marked. These markings are of a thousand and one different designs and colors.

The dice are cast either from the hand, a cup, bowl or basket. Many of the stick dice are thrown on stones, either held in the hand or on the ground in front of the player. The object of this is to make the dice bound over and over thus insuring a fair cast.

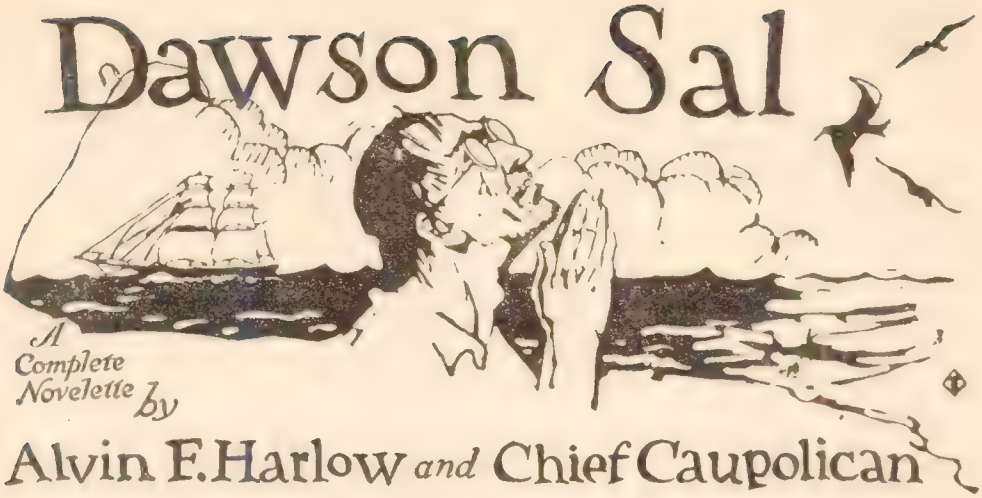
The Indian, even as does the white man and the African enthusiast, speaks endearingly to his gaming implements, beseeching the Great Twin Brethren, the Spider Woman or whoever happens to be the deity presiding over that particular game of chance to cause "Lady Luck" to hover in his or her vicinity.

I have heard some of the younger generation living on the Mesa Grande Reservation coin their own phrases, decidedly modern and have heard the elder men and women chanting gaming songs so old that even the most ancient of the tribe had forgotten the meaning of the words.

In closing it might be well to add that perhaps the only loaded dice found are those used by the Tlingits of Alaska.

The dice, samples of which are in the American Museum of Natural History, are of ivory and wood, chair shaped, one inch high, twelve sixteenths of an inch wide at the back and ten sixteenths of an inch at the side. There are from three to four tiny lead plugs in these dice to give weight to the pieces, and make the casting easier.

Dawson Sal



A Complete Novelette by

Alvin F. Harlow *and* Chief Caupolican

ON A September morning, twenty-nine years ago—it is my old friend, Captain Jefferson Byllsby talking—I sailed out of New York harbor bound for Frisco as bosun's mate on the good old sailing ship *Martha Grace*, Captain Timoleon Cravens. The tug was taking us through the Narrows when the crew lined up aft and the mate, Mr. Gunby, called the roll. With some exceptions we had a fairly good bunch of hands that trip; most of them smart sailors, biddable and good workers; but much against Captain Cravens's will, three of them had been shanghaied. The day before we were to sail, we had only seventeen of our full outfit of twenty signed up; Mr. Gunby got impatient and made a deal with a crimp for three men, and they were tossed on board that night.

Two of these chaps were able to stagger on deck when the mate called the crew aft next morning. They'd had some experience at sea; at least, they had made two or three voyages. They admitted to some of the men later that they were English convicts who had escaped from Tasmania and worked up somehow to Hong Kong, where they'd shipped to New York. The rest of the crew didn't like them, and the only good thing I knew about them was that they seemed to have a sort of friendship for each other—if you could call it that. But they were as hard a looking couple as ever you'd wish to see outside a penitentiary. Fitkins, the younger man, was an undersized, cringing cur. Hoake, the other, had a mug that was a fair map of Satan's kingdom, and I think he didn't care who noticed it. The tougher he looked, the better his face suited him. A pretty definite theory grew up among the men that he was a murderer. I could well believe it. He had the disposition to do murder, and when a man has the tendency, the opportunity usually comes his way sooner or later.

"Still one man short," says the mate. "Probably snoozing away in his bunk. Go for'ard and get him, Byllsby."

I went forward into the forecastle and looked around, and sure enough, lying in one of the bunks was a man fully dressed and snoring like somebody filing on a cow horn. He was middle-aged and gaunt, had a long, solemn face, stiff black hair, and what struck me at once as a queer sight, he was wearing old silver-rimmed spectacles; one of only two men I ever saw at sea in the old sailing vessels with glasses on.

I shook him long and hard before he showed a sign of consciousness. Then he gulped and opened his eyes slowly, still logy and stupid.

"Get up!" says I, shaking him again.

He stared at me and mumbled something I didn't catch.

"Come! Roll out and get on deck!" says I, pretty sharp.

His eyes goggled at me through the glasses, a little more rational.

"On deck?" he mutters. "What do you mean? Where am I?"

"I mean you're on ship board and the mate's calling for you."

"Dawson Sal," copyright, 1924, by Alvin F. Harlow and Chief Caupolican.

His gaze wandered around the bunk in amazement.

"On shipboard?" he says. "On a ship? Why should I be on a ship?"

"Blister me if I know!" says I, smartly, like the young cub that I was. "But you're outward bound for Frisco and Sandy Hook is just abeam. Look lively now! Show a leg or pass a stocking!"

"What are you talking about?" he asked, still not quite getting the situation.

"I want you out on deck in three shakes of a lamb's tail. Got a nice job waiting for you out there, and it won't wait long."

"I'll not go!" he says.

He was beginning to catch the drift of things.

"Oh, yes, you will!" says I.

His face had got stubborn and angry. He argued that he was a Christian minister, not a sailor, and that he would not go for a voyage as a seaman.

"Bring the captain here," he says peevishly. "This must be straightened out. I've been shanghaied, I reckon; but there is a moral law, my friend. You can't take a man away from the Master's service."

"The captain's too busy to drop in and inquire after your health this morning," says I. "Now I hate to be rough, but there's a bulldog out on deck who don't care for anybody's finer feelings, and he'll be here after you in a minute. So for your own good I'm going to take you out to him before he plumb loses his temper."

With that I collared him and hauled him up on his feet. Then I saw that he was wearing the coat of a Salvation Army officer, though it was terrible dirty and mussed. He had no hat or cap. He was still too wabbly from the dope to make much resistance. We were just in time; as I shoved him up the ladder to the poop deck, we met the mate, coming to find out the cause of the delay.

"So that's the swab, is it?" says he. "Looks like poor material to me. I believe McJunkin did us brown on this order. Stand up here!" he says to the man.

"He's a little weak yet, sir," I reminded him.

"We'll soon have him up and about," says the mate. "Give him a bucket of water."

With that a sailor ups and lets the poor —— have the water full in the face. The shock sent him staggering backward. His heels struck a coil of rope and he sat down heavily on it. He sputtered and coughed, then pulled an old blue bandana from his pocket, took off his glasses and wiped the water off them. He was trembling, partly from weakness and partly from anger, I think.

"What's your name?" asks the mate. "And what's that uniform you've got on—Swanville Silver Cornet Band?"

"My name is John Diggs," answers the man, "and I'm an officer in the Salvation Army."

"——!" says Gunby. "I knew we'd been swindled! Just wait till I see that fellow McJunkin again!"

Diggs had got to his feet by this time and he cried out:

"I protest against this outrage! I want to be put ashore at once!"

"Too late, Brother Diggs," says Gunby in his mocking way. "We don't make any more stops this side of San Francisco, California."

"But we're still in sight of land," says Diggs, pointing, "and there's a tug still pulling the ship. Why can't I go back on it?"

"Because that tug ain't allowed to carry passengers," says the mate. "That's reason aplenty. You wouldn't want the captain of that tug to lose his license, would you?"

"This is a crime!" the man screams out. "I'm a servant of God! I won't desert His cause! My work back yonder in the city—they won't know what's become of me. Put me ashore, I tell you!"

Gunby made two long strides and clutched him by the collar.

"Listen, friend!" says he, holding him at arm's length like a schoolmaster with a little boy. "You close that trap of yours or I'll close it for you. You're in a different world now from the one you've been used to, and the captain and I are the only two gods in it. You'll serve us four months or longer, whether you like it or not, and then you can go back to your old boss. We allow no back talk here, and the sooner you get that through your noodle, the better it'll be for you. Now get in line there and be —— quick about it!"

JOHN DIGGS was an obstinate, opinionated man; one of those fellows who can't be convinced they are wrong and who find it hard to absorb an idea somewhat out of their narrow

grooves of thought. He should have known enough about being shanghaied to be certain that there was no getting out of it, once you were in; but it had never occurred to him that it might happen to him, and he was firmly determined that it shouldn't, in spite of all precedents. But now when it finally began to seep through his brain that there really might be no hope of escape, he fell silent and was the most wobegone chap you ever saw.

The mates—there were only two on our ship—then chose watches, ten men in each. The mate's was the port watch and the second mate's the sta'board. The second mate won the toss and took first choice. The three shanghaied men, as might have been expected, were the last ones chosen and of these the second mate got Fitkins, while Gunby had to take Hoake and Diggs. He cut a sneering joke about it not being fair to make him work with a short-handed watch, and the other men all snickered and haw-hawed over it.

At first Diggs was either sullen or dazed, and hadn't much to say, but he couldn't keep silent long. The men began calling him "Salvation" immediately; but after they learned that he came originally from a little inland town named Dawson, somebody shortened the Salvation to "Sal" and dubbed him "Dawson Sal;" and as it had a sort of Wild West sound, the nickname made a hit on the spot. After that no one called him anything else.

Fortunately, he was a bachelor. He had been working among the sailors along the waterfront, and he said his work had been blessed with good results; but of course the crimps and saloonkeepers and dive-keepers were all down on him, because if sailors all got religion and started savings accounts, their business would mostly go to the dogs. So something had been slipped into Diggs's coffee one night at a cheap restaurant and McJunkin, the crimp, killed two birds with one stone—he got rid of a disturbing element and he collected pay for one able seaman.

Sal was a frightfully awkward lubber and he hadn't overly much strength. When they first sent him aloft I expected any moment to see him crack his skull on the deck or plop into the sea. He always hated and rebelled inwardly against the ship work, and when he could he avoided it. But after two or three glum days right at the start I noticed that he became more talkative and seemed a little more reconciled, if possible.

He told me that after thinking it over he felt more resigned, he having surmised that maybe his coming aboard was all a part of the Divine plan. Perhaps Providence, who did nothing haphazard, had sent him to that ship to work His will among the men and maybe save the whole crew as brands from the burning; for it seemed to be his opinion that sailormen in general were all headed straight for Torment and the skids greased.

If he could pluck only one little shriveled but precious soul from our imperfect lot, then he would care nothing for the pain and the humiliation and the knocking out of his work on shore; another would be provided to attend to that.

"I wish I could be a philosopher like that," says I.

"That ain't philosophy, Mr. Byllsby," he came back at me, quickly. "That's faith; and you can have it as well as I can. It would mean the most precious peace your soul has ever known. Oh, my brother—" and away he went, —— bent for Heaven, as the fellow says.

Now I'd always had a sort of religion of my own, but I wanted to take it my own way, and it fair embarrassed me to have a preacher open up on me at short range about salvation. So I pretended to have business elsewhere and sneaked away from Sal, but he didn't lose heart at that; he took up the subject the minute he sighted me again, and meanwhile he was working on the rest of the crew.

One of the first jobs he tackled was to stop swearing on board. Can you imagine it? But things like that were trifles to Sal. He admonished, he exhorted, he gently reproved and he prayed with 'em. Yes, sir! Many an evening in the foc'sle or on the for'ard deck did Dawson Sal wrestle mightily in prayer for some sinner who'd been specially unsanitary in his language, and sometimes he had to intercede for the whole crew at once.

It was a queer sight on those warm evenings when we were beating down the tropical Atlantic; Sal on his knees, turning up his long, lean countenance frowsed over with black stubble, the lantern light flashing on his specs and showing up the deep lines in his jaws and the cavernous hollows of his

eyes; hands clasped down against his thighs or up against his chest when he got excited; his harsh voice saying, "Look down in mercy upon Thy servant Joe Gummidge, and help him guard his tongue against blasphemy;" the men sitting around on rope and spars if they were on deck; some sneering—Hoake always; the fellow who was prayed for looking mighty sheepish, but most of them hushed and awed.

"Oh, shucks, Sal!" says Joe Gummidge, who generally took it all in good part. "You jest cain't run a ship without cuss-words. It ain't never been done in history."

"You don't suppose there was any cursing on board when the Apostle Paul sailed across the Mediterranean, do you?" says Sal, triumphantly. "Nor when the Pilgrim Fathers came to America in the Mayflower?"

"Might not 'a' been among them religious passengers," says Joe. "But I'll bet the' was cussin' done—private—by the onregenerate crew. Ain't no use talkin', Sal, you jest cain't bear the strain of the seafarin' life without usin' a byword now and then, and you'll find it out before the v'yage is over."

Sal wasn't mocked as much as you'd think he would be. Sailors are superstitious; they know their lives are always hanging by a slender thread of rope-yarn, and it takes mighty little persuasion to induce them to throw themselves on to any superhuman power, real or supposed, that seems likely to help 'em out in emergencies. All that some of 'em need is an exhorter to make 'em feel solemn and pious.

But the nerviest thing Sal did in his anti-swearing crusade was to call down the mate. Yes, sir! He put it right up to that hard-boiled guy! Gunby had a line of profanity that would have blistered the tongue of any ordinary man, and he'd used it on Sal on more than one occasion, too. He'd just finished bestowing some of it on two fellows who'd made a bad splice when Sal tackled him.

"It's not entirely on my own account," says Sal to him, "though the sound of blasphemy is abhorrent to me. But it's mostly because He hears you when you take His holy name in vain, which you do a hundred times a day, I reckon, more or less. Wouldn't it be a noble thing for you, the first officer of this ship, to set a high example for your men, and not encourage them in foul and profane swearing, which is an offense against the Almighty? Oh, consider, consider, my brother, while yet there is time!"

And so on and on. When he finally paused for breath Gunby—who had been staring at him as if struck dumb—broke in, in that cold, sarcastic way of his:

"Dear me, I'm afraid I've been very thoughtless, Mr. Diggs, very thoughtless—even wicked. There is much truth in what you say. Anyhow, I'm anxious to do whatever you wish; we want you to be satisfied with the way this vessel is handled, so if I can do anything to uplift these low and degraded sailormen, I'm determined to do it. I shall try hard to improve my conduct and give you no further cause for complaint."

With that he made a polite bow and turned to look at a distant ship through his glass.

Sal backed away, very red, knowing he was being made a mock of and wondering what the mate really meant to do. But Gunby intended having his fun out of it in his own way. And would you believe it? For three whole days he didn't swear; at least, not while Sal was on deck. But the ball-room politeness that he put on was as good as a show. It was:

"Mr. Byllsby, if you don't mind, will you be so good as to escort some men aloft and take in those fore-royal and foreto'gallant stuns'ls?"

And I would come back with—

"No trouble at all, sir. Mighty glad to do it, sir."

Or he would say to Sal:

"Really, I must beg your pardon, Mr. Diggs, but we don't tie a clove hitch in just that manner. If you can't make any tidier job than that, perhaps you'd better go down in the galley and play 'authors' with the doctor."

Some of the shellbacks thought it was so funny that they took it up, too, and there was more bowing and scraping and apologizing than ever was seen on an old hooker before. Hoake, of course, was the worst of the lot. He would rip out the nastiest word he could think of right in front of Sal, and then take off his hat and hold his head down and say— "Ow, Hi beg yer parding, Mr. Diggs, Hi 'umbly beg yer parding, and Hi 'ope God'll forgive me, but Hi seems to be so grounded and sodden in

sin that Hi cawn't break meself of the 'abit."

ON THE third day of this folderol a squall blew up on us off Antigua. The mate was snoozing like a rock at the time, but the blow came up so fast that the captain called all hands. Gunby woke up with a start, and in his excitement he plumb forgot the new etiquette and came on deck generating a blue haze at every step.

"Clew up and furl those royals, you —— —— —— lubbers!" he yelled. "What the —— —— and —— is the matter with you? —— your —— souls, are you paralyzed? Down with those jibs and mainto'gallant stays'l! Lively now, or by the —— —— ——, I'll break your —— —— necks!"

I'm just giving you a mild sample. Gunby, I think, was the finest original and imaginative cusser that I've ever heard in all my thirty-five years at sea. His vocabulary had some of the most unique and blasphemous allusions to the Trinity and the events recorded in the Four Gospels that were ever put into words. I wish I'd written 'em all down, though some of 'em I'd be ashamed to repeat to you, even in this profane age.

"Gosh, this seems natural again!" says Joe Gummidge to me while Gunby was doing his best. "T' tell ye the truth, Jeff, I ain't felt right the last three days. The atmosphere's been too rare for my lungs."

Well, that ended the profanity strike on the *Martha Grace*, and after that, things went on about as previous. Even Sal relaxed his efforts a bit, seeing how useless they were when the pinch came.

But even at that, Sal had some of the men thinking, and they might have got pretty serious if it hadn't been for three or four things.

To begin with, he was a bit too high-handed with his religion. If he thought he had a man weakening, he'd hound him too hard. He fairly ran some of the men ragged, trying to chase 'em up to the mourner's bench. Dan McClatchey told me once that he thought some of gettin' religion just to satisfy Sal and keep him off his neck, but he said Sal was so —— awkward, he was afraid that when he went to baptize him, he'd drown him.

And then Sal was so lubberly, always scared when he went aloft, he hated his tasks so bitter that he'd shirk at times, and he'd stop work at any moment to do some exhorting, which some of the men thought was too much of a good thing. And then there was his fearful appetite! It was lucky for him that the *Martha Grace* was a good feeder, for the way he ate was devastating. We had many bigger, huskier men than he was, but he had the most ravenous appetite of the lot. It made him seem more animal than spiritual.

Now the grub on some vessels is much more plentiful than on others. If a ship is not a good feeder, the men divide the bread and hardtack evenly, and each takes his whack and stows it in his locker. But the grub on the *Martha Grace* was "full and plenty," as the sailors say. In such a case each watch's bread allowance for each meal is put in a big box and each man goes and takes out what he needs for the meal. There was usually some bread left when the port watch had done eating, and Sal ate all of it.

One raw, rainy evening the sta'board watch, which had just come off duty at eight bells, were sitting around on their bunks, having a chat before turning in. The door opened and Dawson Sal came in. He was in the other watch, you know. He stood just inside the door, looking about uncertainly. Finally he said in that harsh voice of his—

"Gentlemen, I want to ask a favor of you."

"All right, what is it?" said some one, but big Dan McClatchey raised his hand and called out—

"Wait a minute!"

Mac was a rough citizen and he liked a rough sort of a joke. He'd always teased and jeered at Sal, more or less.

"You can't call me a gintleman and git away wid it," says he. "There are no gintlemen here. Call the rest of these scuts gintlemen if you want to; they know they're not, but they like it. But if you want anny favors from this crowd, address us as 'Gintlemen, and McClatchey, you ——!' "

Sal's face flamed red as a Turkey carpet.

"I can't say that!" says he, firmly.

"Why can't ye?" demanded Dan.

"I can't because I won't," says Sal. "I am a Christian, and I'm going to keep my mouth clean."

"What's wrong wid the remark?" asks Dan. "You ain't takin' anny of the holy names in vain when you say it."

"It's a vulgar swear-word," declared Sal.

"Well, you'll say it or get no hearin' from this crowd," Mac asserted, and he wagged his head threateningly.

"I won't do it!" again says Sal, red and flustered but firm.

"Then out ye go!" and Dan waved him off.

Sal hesitated, still flushing and fumbling with the door handle. Then without another word he turned slowly, shuffled out and closed the door.

There was some laughing after he had gone and much speculation as to what he wanted. But the interest had died down a bit and some of the men had gone to bed when Sal opened the door again, ten minutes later. He came in more quickly this time. McClatchey was in his bunk and Sal tried to get in his request before the Irishman could interfere.

"Gentlemen," he said, "please listen a moment——"

Dan's big feet thudded on the floor and he yelled—

"What did I tell ye to say?"

"But listen, Mr. McClatchey!" Sal pleaded earnestly.

"Go on! Finish it!" roared Mac, rising and clenching his big, hairy fists.

"I won't say it! I won't dirty my tongue with it!"

"Then you ask no favors here. Git out!" says Mac, stubborn and bound to carry his joke through, even if he had to lick the sky-pilot.

Sal lifted his head and looked him square in the eye. It seemed for a moment as if he might defy the scrappy Irishman; but his gaze finally wavered, he turned silently, went out again and closed the door.

Argument was lively then as to what he wanted and whether he would come back or not. Some of the men believed he would give in to Dan, while others insisted he was too stanch to use even a vulgar word like that. Some of 'em even made bets on it.

Nobody went to sleep. They'd all got rather keen about the affair by that time and sat up to see the outcome. It was fully twenty minutes before Sal came back again. He was still embarrassed, but there was a sort of determination about him, too. The talk hushed as quick as he stepped inside.

"I reckon I must give in," says he, and then, very red, "Gentlemen, and McClatchey, you ——!"

There was a howl of delight that nearly raised the roof. Some called out to others, "I win! Hand over that money, Jake!" and so on. But the racket soon subsided, for they wanted to hear his request; and then he went on as if it had been part of the same sentence—

"—God forgive me!"

That sort of threw a wet blanket on the fun, and there were only a few uneasy snickers. Then Sal continued, seeming a bit relieved now that he'd got over the worst of it:

"I want to know if you men will let me have the bread your watch leaves in the bread-box after meals."

Well, they all agreed to it and that extra bread seemed to chirk him up no little. He must have craved it fearfully, to go through such an ordeal to get it; and between meals he carried a piece of it in his pocket and munched at it when he should have been hauling at a sheet.

ON MOST sailing vessels there are no sweets in the sailor's diet; nothing but sugar for his coffee and maybe, once in a long while, a little dab of molasses. No pie, no preserves, not even dried fruit. I used to carry some cakes of chocolate with me, but few of the sailors ever provided themselves with anything of the sort. Captain Cravens believed that the men would be better off with a few sweets, but it was not the custom for the owners to supply any, so he would stock some marmalades and jelly in his cabin, bought with his own money, and sell them to the men at what they cost him.

Of course Dawson Sal didn't have a cent in his pocket when he came aboard—the crimps saw to that; and what with the two months' advance McJunkin had drawn on his pay, and the oilskins and clothes he'd had to buy from the slop-chest, we'd be in sight of Frisco before he'd have any salary coming to him; so he couldn't buy any jam, though I'm sure no man on the ship craved sweets any more.

He begged a little from some of the men, but a fellow has to be more or less selfish at sea where things are scarce, and Sal didn't get many tastes of jam and jelly. I feel certain he prayed over the matter. He stood it as long as he could and then he came to me and said:

"Mr. Byllsby, will you loan me a dollar? I want some of that sweet stuff from the captain. I'll pay you when I get my salary.

or you can have the captain hold it out, even if there's only a dollar coming to me."

I let him have the dollar and he almost ran to the captain's cabin. It was curious after that to see how he tried to make his jam last a long time; how he held himself down to a certain quantity at each meal, and how he hated to close the jar and put it away.

Sal of course had no sea chest to put his dunnage in, so he just kept his jam over at the back of his bunk. One day when there were three or four men in the foc'sle but Sal was on deck, Hoake coolly reached over and got one of Sal's unopened jars of jam and ate nearly a third of it. The others didn't look on the act with favor, especially old Bill Lueders.

"That ain't decent, Hoake," says he.

Hoake mumbled some slur on the canting, psa'm-singing cur, and went on eating.

"Now, look here!" says Bill, walking up to him. "It ain't my business, maybe, but Sal ain't here to look after his property so I'm going to do it for him. You close that jar and put it away and be quick about it! And mind, I'm going to tell Sal who stole the stuff."

"Tell him and be ——!" says Hoake.

But he didn't eat any more of the jam, and after bluffing around a bit, he closed the jar and put it away. Lueders was fifty years old, but he was as big as the side of a house and he had a punch in his fist that was highly respected by every man in the ship; so Hoake wasn't spoiling for trouble with him.

That evening in the first dog watch, while Sal and the rest were waiting for supper and getting out their jam and jelly, Sal noticed that one of his jars had been opened. His face went white with anger.

"Somebody's been stealing my jam!" he cried, petulant as a little boy.

Bill Lueders spoke right up—

"It was Hoake."

Sal glared at Hoake with his mouth shut tight and his nostrils working. He was almost mad enough to fight. Hoake swaggered over to him and said—

"Well, d'yer want to do anything about it?"

At that Sal's face flushed and a look which seemed to be tinged with uneasiness came over it. He looked down at the floor and finally said:

"No, I don't want to fight, if that's what you mean."

"Oh, yer don't!" says Hoake, sneering. "Maybe this'll 'elp yer courage!" and he gave Sal a vicious smack on the side of the face—all but knocked him over.

Sal's hands clutched the edge of the bunk till the knuckles were white and he breathed hard, looking as if he'd like to cut the bully's heart out; then his eyes dropped to the floor again. Something was holding him back. I couldn't help feeling that his stomach didn't relish the idea of a fight. Finally he says, very quietly—

"May God forgive you!"

"A—a—ah, stow that whimperin'!" Hoake snarled; and he drew back his fist, but Bill Lueders stopped him.

Bill argued that Hoake had no right to take advantage of the fact—at least, he so understood it—that preachers were forbid by their religion to fight. Hoake denied that this was the reason for Sal's forbearance, and while he and Bill were engaged in a regular polemical discussion, Sal, with eyes closed, had turned his face upward and way praying:

"Plead thou my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me; for lo, they lie in wait for my soul."

Domenico came along with the supper just then and the quarrel subsided.

Sal was evidently uneasy lest there be some question as to his courage, for he alluded to the affair whenever he was in my vicinity during the next two or three days.

"If I didn't actually follow the command to turn the other cheek," said he, watching my face anxiously, "I did the same thing; I didn't strike back.

"I pray God," said he at another time, "that the day may come when men will find other ways to settle disputes than by blows."

I made no reply to these timid arguments for the defense; I am sorry for it now. But I was feeling a little bit of contempt, or maybe it was no more than impatience, at Sal's pacifism or cowardice or whatever it was. To me he was an unattractive personality and I found it difficult sometimes to make excuses for him.

Awkward, untactful, tiresome, blundering, I wondered how he could have made much success with his work on shore. But though I couldn't feel any great liking for

him yet I can't deny that I had a touch of pity, which they say is akin to liking. Perhaps the very fact that I was vexed with him for showing the white feather indicated that I had a certain regard for him which I didn't realize myself.

WE STRUCK a week of light airs in the tropics when we could make little way, but we worked as hard as if it had been a week of storms. The captain kept us jumping from top to deck and from deck to yard, shifting, trimming, trying to trap every little capful of air that stirred. Hot rains fell on us, the ropes were soaked and stiff, and the officers out of humor and ugly. We tried working in oilskins and we tried it mother-naked, and it was terrible either way.

Everybody was grouchy, including Dawson Sal. How he hated his job! The mate caught him skulking one day when he should have been aloft, and kicked him so hard that he went reeling into the galley and upset the cook and a kettle of boiling hot beans. Sal didn't seem to have much hope of converting Gunby after that, though he said similar miracles had been accomplished. He mentioned it to me the day the mate found the scratches on the deck.

Mr. Gunby was one of the most old-maidish men you ever saw about his deck. He kept it looking like a mirror and the fellow that messed it up was headed straight for trouble. The day we got out of those doldrums, when the sky cleared and gave us a nice breeze, he set all hands to holystoning it. It was Sunday morning, so Sal said—he was the only one who kept track of it—and he'd always objected to doing that sort of work on the Sabbath.

He said we spent enough time loafing during the week to clean up such chores as that, so we could have rested on Sundays and meditated on the hereafter.

But the bosun, Jack Jonas, would say to him:

"Remember, we're in that other world Mr. Gunby was tellin' you about. Them Ten Commandments is null and void in these latitoods. Out here the first commandment is—

"'Six days shalt thou labor and do all that thou art able,
And on Sunday thou shalt holystone the deck and scrape the cable.'"

That rime never made much of a hit with Sal.

Well, it wasn't two hours after we'd got the deck all polished up, bright as a saloon bar, when the mate discovered two long scratches on it, where somebody with shoes on had slipped. You may believe me, Gunby was furious! He started out at once, seeking the fellow who'd done the dirty work.

Most of us had been barefooted all day, but everybody who wore shoes must be inspected. No nails! Finally nobody was left but Fitkins, who was at the wheel. The mate ordered him to take his shoes off, which the poor wretch did, so frightened he trembled in every muscle. Sure enough, there were two nails protruding a little from the heel of one of them.

"D'ye see those?" demanded Gunby, glaring at him.

"Why, Mr. Gunby," whined Fitkins, cringing like a cowed pup, "them little nyls eyn't stickin' out far enough for to scratch anythink."

"Oh, they ain't!" says Gunby. "I'll show you whether they ain't!"

And with that, he seized Fitkins's jaw and drew the heel of that shoe down the side of his face, leaving two long, deep scratches from temple to chin. The blood dripped from them down on to his shirt. Sal and I were not far off; I heard him gasp, and when I looked at him his face was white as death. Every now and then after that I saw him staring at Gunby in a half-puzzled, half-horrified way, as if he couldn't quite comprehend the man's mental processes.

"The mate is a hard man, Byllsby," said he to me. "He must have a heart like flint. But maybe he's no harder than Saul of Tarsus, who helped to kill the martyr Stephen; and Saul became one of the Lord's mightiest apostles. But I don't know, I don't know—" and he shook his head, perplexed—"I'm afraid it ain't for me to convert Mr. Gunby. Somehow, I haven't got the gift of the Spirit strong enough."

A spell of rough weather followed the calms, and Sal had a tough time of it, getting drenched, cussed and knocked about the deck by heavy seas. He was in constant fear that his glasses might be broken; and he was so near-sighted that he'd have been in a serious pickle without them. He had tied a string to their bows and carried it

around his head so that they wouldn't get knocked off and lost. All this rough stuff rasped his nerves badly, though he tried to hold himself steady; and it finally brought out the old unregenerate strain that lies down deep in every man, I reckon, and mighty near made him fall from grace.

WE WERE off the River Plata and had had a few days of good weather when the captain noticed the glass falling again, and decided to bend on some new royals and skys'ls that he had ready and wanted to get in place before we reached the Horn. When he made this decision several of us were aloft, taking in stuns'ls and some other canvas. Sal and I were working on the main to'gallant yard, I on the weather side, he on the lee.

There was enough of a breeze to ruffle the water a bit and make her roll somewhat and Sal, scared as usual, was hanging on for dear life and threatening every moment to fall. The captain passed the order for the new sails; we didn't hear it, but all of a sudden the second mate let go the halyard that held our yard. It is a rule of the sea never to do such a thing without warning those aloft; but the second mate was a young, excitable lubber, on his second voyage only—and had got his job by being related to the owners, somehow—and when the order came from the captain, of whom he was much in awe, he just let go the halyard without remembering to yell at us, and the yard dropped right out from under our feet, leaving us dangling in the air.

Even I, taken unawares, might have fallen if I hadn't heard the first grunt of the rope in the sheaves and felt the first jump of the yard before it dropped. I grabbed the lift, which was hanging slack—the lift, you know, is the small wire cable that suspends the yard-arm when it is dropped to its lowest point—and at the same time I yelled to Sal—

"Grab the lift and hold tight!"

As the lift came taut with a snap I threw one leg over it and slid down to the yard, calling on Sal to do the same. No sooner had my feet hit the yard than I let loose some language aimed at the dash-blanked son of a sea-cook who'd loosed that rope and nearly killed us. I didn't care if it was the captain himself who did it, I wanted him to know what I thought of him; and I had a pretty tidy flow of cuss-words in those days, too.

Meanwhile Sal swung, kicking wildly from the lift on his side of the yard. Every moment I expected to see him lose his grip and go down like a blob of lead. But finally he managed to hook one leg over the wire and slid down to the yard, feeling for it with his feet in his awkward way; one foot slipped off and got tangled in the head earing cringle and he nearly fell again; but at length he got himself hunched down on the end of the yard, clutching the lift with one arm and both hands. His face was white and twisted with fright and rage; his lips were drawn back over his teeth as tight as a drumhead; he shook his fist down at the deck and screamed out—

"God—"

Then something caught him up short; he seemed to realize what he was saying. His face changed and a new kind of horror came over it. His clenched fist was still shaking as he finished, in a lower tone but still queer and strained—

"—bless our home!"

I was old enough to know better even then, but—well, perhaps it was partly because of relief that neither of us was killed—anyhow, I howled with delight. I'm still older now and I don't think I'd laugh quite so hard at the spectacle of a man's soul struggling to keep the faith when the old Adam was trying to drag him down. But I was still pretty much of a boy then, and so I couldn't keep the story to myself when I got down on deck. The men all thought it was a great joke.

"What did I tell ye!" exclaimed Joe Gummidge. "I knowed he'd come to it. Take him on another v'yage and he'd cuss as well as anybody."

But Sal was filled with remorse.

"For sixteen years," he says to me, "I haven't desecrated God's name nor used any vile language; and now here I get mad and break a holy commandment! Ho, me!" with a heavy sigh. "The flesh is never above temptation!"

There was some joshing in the foc'sle that night, but it hushed a bit when Sal went down on his knees and prayed, not for others this time, but for his own sinful self. He said—it must have been a Bible quotation—that there was no rest in his bones because of his sin; that his wickednesses had overwhelmed him and were like

a sore burden, too heavy for him to bear; that his strength failed him because of his iniquity and that he had become a broken vessel and a reproof among his enemies and neighbors.

I thought he was a little hard on himself, just for one casual cuss-word, but Sal seemed to take it very serious. He asked for help, too, to resist further temptation.

"Keep thou my mouth as it were with a bridle," he begged, "while the ungodly is in my sight."

It was down around the Horn that the last straw was laid on Hoake's hatred of Gunby; and let me tell you, it was no small thing to have that man's enmity, for he was about as nice a person to have around as a cobra. I decided right at the start that he was a dangerous man. He was too handy with weapons to suit me—a knife, for instance. From the time he came aboard he cursed his ill-luck in that the crimps had stolen his knife from him, a big one which he had carried, he said, for years; but I, for one felt more comfortable to think that he didn't have such a tool.

The mate detested him, and the farther we sailed on our way the harder he rode the fellow. There was a queer turn one day down off the Falklands when Hoake dropped a bucket of tar from one of the mizzen yards almost on Gunby's head. He yelled, "Stand from under!" too late for any one to have dodged it, and the bucket missed Gunby only a foot or so.

Hoake swore it was an accident and explained just how it happened, but Gunby firmly believed he had tried to bash him on the head with it. The bucket had turned over as it came down and threw a spatter of tar on the mate's arm; and blast me if he didn't make Hoake come down and lick that tar off his clothes, while he stood with a belaying pin in hand, ready to crack him over the head if he made a false move. And then Hoake had to clean the tar off the deck and scrub and holystone it!

He grew more surly and insubordinate after that, and by the time we'd rounded the Horn, Gunby had knocked him cold twice, and on the second occasion had beaten his face to a pulp. His hatred of the officer was simply poisonous. He cursed and threatened him, behind Gunby's back, of course, in his moments of passion, but men make threats, you know, at such times that don't mean much; they're just loose talk. But what was more serious, I heard from some of the men that he was doing some sort of talking in calmer periods; enlarging upon his wrongs and swearing that he was going to kill the mate. Apparently he didn't mind the consequences to himself.

"I'll 'ang for that man yet!" was one of his remarks.

He didn't do this talking before me. I was little more than one of the seamen as far as rank was concerned, but the fact that I held a petty office set me apart, in his way of thinking. He didn't talk it in Sal's presence, either, probably suspecting that Sal might walk right off to Gunby or the captain and tell the whole story. In fact, he'd done the worst of his talk only among a few of the tougher citizens of the crew; but Lueders and Gummidge and one or two others got hold of it and gossiped about it to me, though most of them didn't think it anything more serious than the growling of a surly bluffer.

We struck some rough weather going around the Horn, but the ship stood it like a Trojan. She was a stanch old girl and a beautiful sailer, but Captain Cravens—nervy old codger—was a great hand for plenty of canvas, and he kept up full tops'l and fores'l even when it seemed they must be blown out of the bolt-ropes any moment; so when the seas struck us from dead ahead or quartering, she butted her way through 'em instead of riding 'em and made it more or less damp for those of us who were on her deck.

One big sea smashed in the sta'board foc'sle door, carried away a lot of bedding and clothes and broke loose the spare spars that were lashed for'ard. One of the spars, coming down over the main deck, struck Fitkins and carried him overboard. It was impossible to save him. I think Hoake's bitterness against the officers increased after Fitkins's death. He would chew his lips and glower at them like a caged tiger looking at raw meat.

It was a wonder Sal didn't go overboard, too. Once when he and Hank Dinkey were both at the wheel and big seas were coming overstern frequently, Sal saw one of 'em rise and fairly tower over him until it darkened the deck around him; enough to scare any man, Heaven knows; but Sal simply gave a yell and let go the wheel, the worst thing he could do, for it left him without anchorage. The sea went for'ard and took

Sal with it. If the deck houses hadn't been in the way, he might have been going yet; but the broad of his back brought up against the end of the cabin, and then as she rolled, he was swept into the lee scuppers. He was clinging to the deadeyes, coughing and feeling the lump on the back of his head when the mate found him and demanded what he was doing away from his post. Then without giving him a chance to reply, Gunby ordered him with much profanity to go back to the wheel and not be caught away from it again. Sal was deeply grieved to be so misunderstood.

"The man hasn't any reason!" says he to me. "When I tried to explain, he cut me short and threatened to brain me with a belaying pin."

IT WAS marvelous that his glasses escaped that smash. They were not so fortunate a few days later when he got mixed up with Hoake again. That rapscallion had been in more trouble with the mate, and Gunby had given him a terrible tongue-lashing, calling him names it wouldn't do to repeat. Hoake was furious, edging off like a snappish cur, growling and showing his teeth back at the mate.

That looking backward was why he tripped over a loop in the end of a brace that Sal was coiling in his awkward way near the rail. Hoake fell to his knees and several men laughed. He jumped up, his face purple with rage and hit Sal back of the ear, knocking him over against the rail, cutting and skinning his nose on a stanchion and breaking the nose-piece of his glasses, so that the lenses fell apart. It's a wonder that one or both of them wasn't broken; but the string over his ears prevented their falling to the deck.

Sal was greatly excited because he thought his glasses were eternally smashed; but Chips helped him to splice the broken nose-piece by laying a small piece of wire alongside the two ends and lashing all together with stout linen thread, wound over and over. It was a clumsy job and Sal said the lenses didn't seem quite in the right place, but it was the best they could do and it held together well.

We were having some favorable winds just after that, and two weeks later we were working northward near the Juan Fernandez Islands. We had a bit of a blow one day and several of the men were aloft when the mate called to Sal to let go a main to'gallant sheet. Even at that late day Sal hadn't yet learned to recognize all the tackle quickly.

He jumped to the mast and instead of letting go the sheet, he let go the main skys'l halyard! There was an outburst of curses from aloft, but the mate swore louder than anybody.

"Get away from those lines, you cadaverous, lunk-headed idiot!" he yelled, and grabbing Sal by the collar he jerked him away from the mast with such force that he spun around and sprawled on the deck twenty feet distant.

He came down with the side of his face against a ring-bolt, bruising his temple and cheek more or less, but what was a far worse calamity, smashing the left lens of his spectacles into fifty pieces.

Sal had had many mishaps, but the gravity of this one was so inexpressible that he just sat on the deck and stared in a dull sort of way at Gunby, who was too busy to pay any attention to him. That was a serious disaster to Sal. There was no way of replacing the broken lens, and he was badly crippled without it. He was very near-sighted, and having a glass over one eye and none over the other threw his vision out of plumb and sometimes gave him bad headaches.

He thought he could see better by having the left eye closed and using only the right one, which had the aid of the lens. He would squint the left eye shut until the muscles got tired, and then he would put his finger-tips up under the empty frame and hold the lid shut. When he was not at work he would often sit with his eyes closed, to rest them. Our attitude toward Sal grew a bit more sympathetic in those days.

It was along about that time, too, that I suspected that Hoake was watching for his chance to ambush the mate at night. I noticed that on quiet nights when his watch was on duty and there was little to do, he never stayed for'ard, as most of the other men did, but would sneak back and lie down on the main hatch. Twice, too, I found him squatted near the ladder to the poop deck.

We were nearing the Tropic of Capricorn, the nights were mild, and he pretended to be merely taking a doze there. I know he didn't have any knife, but I didn't know

what dirty device he might cook up, and Gunby was too valuable a navigator to be damaged, so I secretly warned him, though it wouldn't seem that such was necessary.

"I'm not afraid of the —— cockney jailbird!" says he.

He was one of those two-fisted bravoes who prefer to fight things out for themselves. To be sure, Hoake hadn't yet committed any crime or been mutinous, and putting a chap under bonds to keep the peace hasn't ever been done on shipboard, that I've heard of. Really, it's best for a mate to fight his own battles and hold down the tough birds either by will power or fist, else he'll lose his value as an officer.

I never knew when it was that Hoake began borrowing the knife out of the galley; I didn't know he was doing it until after the trouble. It seems he'd hung around there for quite a while and made himself friendly with the cook, who was pretty much of a fathead; and finally he learned that there was an extra key to the galley, hanging on a nail in the corner. He stole this without the doctor's being any the wiser; and after that, so we learned later, he would sneak into the galley every night and get the butcher knife and hide it in his clothes. Then just before he went off watch he would slip it back into its place.

It was now the dark of the moon and he was able to do this every night for a week or more without being caught. The knife had been ground until it had a narrow, thin blade almost like a fine dagger. It had a heavy handle that would put plenty of weight behind a blow with it.

I didn't know he was carrying that knife at night or I'd have done something about it. But I became aware one day that Sal suspected that Hoake had designs on the mate. I didn't know then how he'd learned it, but two days later little Tim Killeen, a shrimp with no morals in particular, confessed to me that he and Sal had been on the main deck about half an hour after their watch went on duty at midnight, and with nothing to do, it being a quiet night; that they had seen Hoake sneaking out of the galley, sticking something into his belt.

"What was he stealing?" whispers Sal to Killeen.

"Looked like a butcher knife," says Tim. "Mebbe he aims to stick the mate with it."

Tim said that Sal didn't seem to realize that Hoake might be in earnest; but Tim told him of the threats Hoake had been making.

"Does the mate know of his threats?" Sal asked him.

"Mebbe so, mebbe not," says Tim. "I reckon not. Let him take care of himself."

Tim said that Sal was restless all through that watch and spent most of the time walking the deck. He would sit down for a minute or two, then get up and tramp to and fro again. I think I know what was troubling him. He was fighting a battle with his conscience; trying to make a decision between his Christian duty to avert bloodshed by reporting the matter to the authorities, and his perfectly human grudge against the two men who were enemies to each other. I suppose he came as near hating those two men as a Christian can.

AS I'VE pondered over it in the years since then, I've come nearer, I believe, to understanding the things that moved Sal in those days. Gunby wasn't quite as wicked a man as Sal thought he was. He was a hard man, a rigid disciplinarian, but he really tried to be just, though his justice was seldom tempered with mercy. The ship stood first and foremost with him, and all we men were merely cogs in the machinery. But Sal, rather sensitive and high-tempered, incapable of doing the work and unused to the rigid discipline of the sea, took Gunby's acts as personal attacks on him, and though he tried to exercise Christian forgiveness, yet his capacity for forgiveness was getting badly strained by the time his glasses were broken and something of the old primal savagery was being redeveloped in him.

He had suffered much bitterness from both men; why not stand aside and let them fight out their own battle; as Killeen had suggested, let the mate take care of himself? Every one else on the vessel seemed willing to let matters take their course; why should he interfere and perhaps get himself cursed for his pains, as had happened so often before when he acted with the best of intentions?

That struggle, I haven't a doubt, went on in Sal's mind all next day. I could see him watching Hoake. He looked worried and haggard, as if he hadn't slept. He edged alongside me once, and after a remark or two, said—

"That man Hoake is a tough character."

"He's all of that," I answered.

"Do you think he would go so far as to kill anybody, Byllsby?" he asked, putting his fingers over his left eye and looking at me eagerly with the other.

"I don't think he'd stick at anything if he was mad enough," I told him. "They say he's killed before; why not again?"

Sal kept staring at me; there was an expression almost of anguish on his face. He opened his mouth twice as if to tell me something, but after staring at me a moment longer, he turned away. Of course I know now that he was trying to tell me what he'd seen and heard the night before, and if I had handled him right, I might have got it out of him. How I wished afterward that I had! But I thought that he had merely heard the talk of Hoake's threats, and I'd heard that myself.

More than once that day I noticed him hanging about in Hoake's vicinity when he had an idle moment, watching him in a fascinated kind of way, now and then putting his fingers before his left eye when his vision blurred too badly.

There was a tense feeling in the atmosphere that day that sort of got on my nerves. The air was still and sultry, with a haze over the sky—a breeder of thunderstorms. Somehow I felt that there were other sinister things in the murk, too, though there was nothing that I could put my fingers on. We spent a good share of the day luffing, hauling at the braces, laying her full-and-by and back again, trying to use what wind there was.

The mate's watch was on that night from eight o'clock till midnight. Killeen says that he and Sal again watched Hoake steal out of the galley with the knife, and this time he sat down at the foot of the mainmasts; but a squall blew up in a little while and they were so busy during the rest of their watch that they almost forgot about him. Another nasty little blow came on just before midnight, and the sta'board watch turned out a few minutes ahead of time.

When the port watch turned in, either there were so many people on deck that Hoake hadn't any chance to return the knife to the galley or else he had fully determined to use it by morning; anyhow, he must have gone to his bunk with it still hidden in his clothes.

When they came on deck again at four in the morning, the darkness was intense. The sky was overcast, the wind was already singing pretty smartly in the rigging, and there was lightning on the horizon. The mate set us—for the bosun and I had been called up, too—to taking in stays'ls and getting ready for rougher weather. There was no sunrise that we could see that morning. The blackness just faded slowly into a dull, leaden gray.

I had supposed that everybody was aloft but Sal. With only one good eye, it was generally conceded that he couldn't see well enough to go aloft, so he just did what jobs he could on deck. I was coming down the shrouds from the main top, and was within a few feet of the deck. There wasn't yet light enough for you to identify people if they weren't close by.

Just then the mate hurried along the deck under me, almost running, to reach a halyard that he wanted to slacken. As I glanced down at him I saw, to my horror, another man fall in behind him and overtake him. It was Hoake! He was barefooted and running on tiptoe, and he had a long knife clutched in his right hand.

I saw him just as he overtook the mate and raised his arm for the stroke. I gave a yell of warning, but it would have been too late and Gunby would have been a dead man had not Sal darted out from behind the mainmast and, with one long leap, succeeded in clutching Hoake by the shirt, just as the knife was coming down.

That was enough to distract Hoake's aim a trifle; the point of the knife, instead of sinking into Gunby's neck, struck the upper edge of his shoulder blade and cut a three-inch gash along the thin flesh that lies over the bone, but the force of the blow sent the mate reeling several yards away.

Hoake might have followed him up, but Sal clung to him, pleading with him; and then the fiend—I can see that hideous face, now, all distorted with baffled rage—turned on Sal with the filthiest curses I ever heard, and drove the knife into his chest between the two upper ribs, down into the lung.

It had all happened in ten seconds, I suppose, but by that time I had reached the deck; I jumped on Hoake's back and bore him down, and we quickly had him in irons. The mate directed us to carry Sal into the cabin. The captain took charge of the ship while the carpenter, who also did a little

rough amateur doctoring, put a hasty dressing on the mate's wound.

IT WAS evident from the first that Sal's wound was mortal. We made some little effort to stanch the flow of blood, but it was plain that the knife had gone into the lung and all doctoring would be hopeless. Every time he drew his breath inward, blood gushed out through the wound. We could hear it gurgling inside, and presently it began to appear in his mouth, though we had him propped up with pillows, almost in a sitting position. The mate, though suffering considerably from his wound, stayed by the bedside. Chips and the doctor and I were in the cabin, too, and the captain came in after a bit, for the little squall didn't amount to much.

I never saw Gunby come so near to emotion in all my knowledge of him as he did that morning. He tried to make an encouraging remark or two and then, after a bit, he said:

"Diggs, I want you to know that I appreciate what you did. It was a mighty brave thing."

That was a remarkable concession for Gunby to make. Coming from him, it might almost be called sentimental.

Sal's eyes showed that he was much gratified by it, but his conscience still troubled him. Speaking with much difficulty because of the blood coming up in his throat, he said, in short gasps:

" . . . Might have prevented . . . it all . . . God has punished me . . . for my sin."

He stopped speaking for a bit. He was sinking fast. Then he began to mutter again, thickly and coughing frequently.

"Glad I repented . . . last moment . . . tried to prevent him . . . being a murderer . . . failed . . . God be merciful to me . . . a sinner . . ."

Then he closed his eyes and presently I could hear him murmuring some of his favorite prayers—quotations from the Psalms, I think they were. But the words got more and more indistinct as his utterance was clogged. I think he really choked to death. It was terrible to sit there and see it, and know that we could do nothing.

At the last, when he had practically ceased to breathe, he opened his eyes and looked upward through those old, battered, broken spectacles with a little smile of such perfect peace and contentment that I am confident he knew that God had forgiven him for that thirty-three hours of silence. It seemed to me that he and the Almighty were face to face at that moment. Chips told me afterward that he believed it; and so did I. In another second we knew that all was over.

"A brave soul!" said old Captain Cravens, who was standing just inside the door. "A brave soul! I hope all of you will give him credit for the fine metal that was in him!"

I BELIEVE we did. The day we buried him in the sea, somewhere off Antofagasta, his influence in the ship was greater than it had ever been while he was exhorting and praying with us. Actions often speak louder than words. I, for one, could never forget how true he was to his principles. The sea gave him his test and he proved out fine. His body and brain were made of rather common clay, but God had set something alight in his soul which, if you are capable of seeing it, will illuminate and make beautiful even a rough and misshapen vessel.

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SOMETHING from Hugh Pendexter concerning the historical material from which his new serial starting in this issue is built:

Norway, Maine.

For actual living conditions and bits of frontier history in Minnesota prior to and during the Sioux outbreak of 'Sixty-two I am indebted to the various narratives published by the Minnesota Historical Society, including those of Maj. Salmon A. Buell on Flandrau's defense of New Ulm, Renville's narrative, Big Eagle's version of the war, the accounts given by Wm. W. Pendergast, Mrs. J. E. De Camp Sweet, Dr. Asa W. Daniels, James Ames Humphrey, Marion P. Satterlee, Judge Lorin Cray, J. B. Lamson, a brief history of the massacres as given in *Harper's Monthly*, Vol. 27, June, 1863, and the collection of pioneer experiences as presented in "Old Rail Fence Corners," published by the Book Committee of the several D. A. R. chapters in Minnesota.

I FIND Judge Flandrau's name also spelled "Flandreau." Often there is a variance in the testimony of eye-witnesses of certain happenings, just as there is bound to be, but these differences are usually minor. The Cray narrative is unusually rich in detailed information concerning conditions found by newcomers. In "Old Rail Fence Corners," containing the reminiscenses of nearly a hundred and fifty pioneer men and women, I was pleased to find several of those who went to Minnesota from my own State, Maine.

According to one authority it required ten years to kill off the destructive blackbirds. Among the odds and ends of fact which do not appear in the story is the hanging of Medicine Bottle, brother of Big Eagle, for the part he took in the outbreak, and Big Eagle's three years' imprisonment at Davenport and in the Rock Island Penitentiary. Big Eagle in his narrative declares he never would have surrendered had he known what was to have been his fate. Shakopee, or "Little Six," was caught in Manitoba and hanged in 1864. Little Crow signed the treaty of '51 by the name of Ta-oya-te-duta, *i.e.*, "His People Are Red."

By this treaty the Sioux sold all their lands except a ten-mile wide strip on both sides of the river, extending from Near Fort Ridgely to Big Stone Lake. In '58 the section held by the Mdewakantons and

Wacouta's band, extending to the Yellow Medicine, was reduced by sale of that portion north of the river. This necessitated the Indians' removal south of the river, where there was but little game. The sale was put through by means of Little Crow's influence, says Big Eagle, and as a result he was much blamed.

COL. RICHARD L. DODGE, after thirty-three years experience among the western Indians, says ("Our Wild Indians," p. 163): "The Sioux seem to attach some especial importance to green as funeral color. I have never seen a Sioux Indian use in life a green blanket, but in all the Sioux graves examined by me the remains were found wrapped in blankets of that color." In Dr. H. C. Yarrow's exhaustive work on "Mortuary Customs of the North American Indians" I find no mention of green as a funeral color. Dr. Charles E. McChesney, whom Dr. Yarrow esteemed as "one of the most conscientious and careful of observers," contributes a description of Wahpeton and Sisseton Sioux burial customs and in part says that prior to 1860, and as far back as the oldest members of the tribe can remember, it was customary to bury members of the two tribes in trees or on platforms; "and in those days an Indian was only buried in the ground as a mark of disrespect in consequence of the person being murdered, in which case the body would be buried in the ground, *face down*, etc."

From Col. Dodge's long and continuous experience with the Indians I assume he means scaffolds and tree graves when he speaks of examining Sioux graves. I use the green blanket for plot purposes and feel warranted to do so because of Col. Dodge's statement, but it is only fair to the reader to cite this other evidence, although it be only negative. In the "Handbook of American Indians," under "Color Symbolism," there is no mention of green in connection with the Sioux.

I HAVE followed Satterlee's narrative in describing the Acton murders, which gives six, instead of Big Eagle's four, Sioux as the murderers. According to Big Eagle one of the four hunters found a hen's nest and eggs under a settler's fence, and started to eat them. A companion remonstrated, saying the owner would make trouble. The first man threw the eggs on the ground and accused his companion of being a coward. The other denied the charge and, to prove his bravery, announced he would go to a house and shoot a settler, and asked his accuser if he was brave enough to do the same. Then the other two men decided they would go along and also prove their courage. Big Eagle says Jones had "fled" to his son-in-law's, where he was followed and the men and woman were murdered. I do not believe this account of the killings. It was commonly known among frontier people that Jones, a big man, had no fear of the Indians. He was angry because a borrowed gun had not been returned. If he "fled" he would not have left the fifteen-year-old niece and the baby boy locked up in his house. According to the Saterlee version the Indians called on him and asked for food and were angrily refused because the gun had not been returned. They started for the Baker house. Jones followed with his wife, because he feared the Websters, just arrived, would be frightened. Then followed the massacre as described in the story.

Wapasha's name is commonly spelled "Wabasha" by the pioneers. I have followed the form used by the Bureau of American Ethnology.

THE barefoot boy seen by young Murray Fall at the Lower Agency was the Humphrey whose account of the Lower Agency fight is referred to above. This is a very dramatic recital and very pathetic. Mrs. DeCamp tells how her little boy wished to go to the agency to play with the children, and, which was unusual, she refused permission. The German kitchen girl, who ran away toward the ferry at the first alarm, says Mrs. De Camp, "was never seen again." Mrs. De Camp was taken to Ridgely by a mixed-blood and, on arriving, learned her husband had been dead for ten days, having been mortally wounded at Birch Coulee.

According to the *Harper's Monthly* article the summer-money arrived at Fort Ridgely shortly after Captain Marsh and his men were killed at the Lower Agency ferry. The writer names Henry Balland, for twenty-seven years a dweller in the Sioux country, as being one of the escort. Balland insisted it was only a "drunken frolic." He remained sceptical even after Jack Frazier, a veteran border man, reached the fort and announced Little Crow was coming. Balland went outside to learn the truth and barely had time to duck to cover when the Indians were on all sides of him, shooting at the fort. He managed to reach the river and get away. The four Keike brothers, who had the contract for furnishing hay to the fort, not only notified the settlers but filled all available barrels in the fort with water, hauling it from a spring at the foot of the river bluff nearly half a mile away.

Mrs. Cornelius F. Buck, who with her husband located in Homer, Winona County, in '54, was given the name of "Little Hornet" by the Sioux.

JUDGE LORIN CRAY tells of six or eight Indians suddenly appearing on the east side of the Blue Earth River, near the town line of Shelby and Vernon, Aug. 11, 1864, and killing Noble G. Root and wounding one of his two sons who were stacking grain. This same band killed Charles Mack, of Willow Creek.

Mrs. Catherine Meade, who was at Fort Ridgely during the siege, says that twelve women were prematurely confined during the first 24 hours. The fort's ammunition, says Mrs. Meade, was stored in a blockhouse *outside* the fort, "as a protection from fire." When the powder and lead ran low it had to be brought from outside, a guard being stationed at the blockhouse.

Indian Agent Galbraith's estimate of less than seven hundred whites killed during the outbreak is too low. More than a thousand were killed according to men and women who lived through the scenes. The article on Little Crow by Cyrus Thomas, of the Bureau of American Ethnology, states that the victims exceeded a thousand.

LITTLE CROW had six wives and twenty-two children. His father was accidentally shot and killed while pulling a gun from a wagon. Lamson, in his account of the chief's death, gives some of Little Crow's family history and says that two brothers were killed by the Chippewas, two killed by Little Crow's own braves in a quarrel over the chieftainship. It was in this fight that Little Crow was shot through the wrists. He refused to submit to amputation by an army surgeon and was treated

by a medicine man. Two of his sisters committed suicide.

Nathan Lamson and son Chauncey went five miles from Hutchinson to look after stock. The writer of the narrative had been guarding the stock but was relieved by father and brother and went into Hutchinson to celebrate the Fourth. Father and son went out after sunset to hunt deer. Two miles northwest of the farm they were on a rough road passing several marshy lakes (called "Scattered Lakes" by the Indians) when Lamson, Sr., detected a motion in the bushes. Reconnoitering, they discovered two Indians picking raspberries. These were Little Crow and his sixteen-year-old son, Wo-wi-napa (One Who Appears). He was not recognized by the Lamsons. He had returned to the State that spring to steal horses. A son-in-law and several others had come with him and had killed James McGannon in Wright County.

FROM behind a poplar tree Lamson, Sr., shot the chief in the groin at a distance of thirty-five feet. Lamson had a Colt revolver but was not used to it. Knowing the smoke from the black powder would rise and betray his position he dropped to reload just as Little Crow riddled the bark of the tree with a slug and thirteen buckshot. Chauncey, believing his father dead, bounded into the bushes. Little Crow seized his son's gun and went after him. Both fired at the same moment, and Little Crow fell, mortally wounded in the chest. Thinking more Indians were near, Chauncey ran to Hutchinson. Lamson, Sr., threw away his white shirt, as it made him a conspicuous target, and began retreating. His gun was useless, as when he tried to reload he could not force a ball deeper than nine inches into the barrel. Later it was discovered he had filled the barrel (direct from the flask) to within nine inches of the muzzle.

As the State was paying a bounty for Indian scalps, continues the narrative, one of the soldiers in the relief party scalped the chief. But it was not known he was Little Crow until Hiram Cummins, Co. E, 9th Minnesota Volunteers, identified him by the malformed wrists and the double row of teeth all around.—PENDEXTER.

HERE are more of our letters from pioneers of the old West, testifying in the matter of Stuart Henry's criticism, in the *International Book Review*, of the accuracy of Emerson Hough's local color in "North of 36." The *International Book Review*, as you will remember, later published some similar testimony from pioneers defending Hough and taking strong exception to Mr. Henry's criticism. The many letters received by *Adventure* make final the verdict that the criticism was not well founded and that Emerson Hough stands vindicated as a portrayer of the West.

FROM Andy Adams, well known as the author of several books dealing with the West, notably "The Log of a Cowboy," which the old-timers and other critics rank as the classic of trail-driving days. At the request of *The Cattleman*, the monthly publication of The Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers' Association, *Adventure* was glad to give that magazine an earlier use of this same letter:

Colorado Springs, Colorado.

I was born on a stock-farm in Indiana. On reaching my majority, Texas made its appeal to me and I arrived there during the early '80's. I made a number of trips over the trail with cattle and horse herds. After the trail passed, as a side-line I wrote six books, all fiction and still in print, dealing with the early cattle days, the best of which, according to the popular verdict, is "The Log of a Cowboy." The secret, if one exists, regarding that verdict rests on the fact that it was my first effort and that the incidents in its woof and web, given a fictional treatment, were my own or came under my observation.

THE life of the trail was brief. The first herds reached Abilene, Kansas, in 1867, and the last one of which there is any record was driven under Ab Blocker, foreman, from near Colorado City, Texas, to Deadwood, S. D., in 1893—a span of twenty-seven years, and easily within the memory of thousands of men living.

A defense of "North of 36" merely calls for the line between fact and fiction. When writing of the former the facts must be adhered to; when the latter, the bridle's off and no obligation to any facts exists. Just so the novel as a transcript of life, a day, or an epoch, fills every requirement. The relation of one to the other is the same as that of a ten-cent tin-type to a miniature done by a competent artist. To bridle human imagination would impoverish literature. Mr. Hough knew his market and was artist enough to meet it.

REGARDING the criticism of Mr. Henry, it is self-evident that our critic carries no credentials to speak with authority. "No cattle trails, however, extended within six hundred miles of the Canadian line," says Mr. Henry in attacking the last work of the late Mr. Hough. The fact remains a fact, however, that the trail not only reached that line but crossed it. Tony and Charlie Day, brothers, Texans, crossed the line with their cattle and established a beef ranch near Medicine Hat, Canada. If necessary to verify this statement, we will call Horace Wilson, formerly an inspector for The Texas Cattle Raisers' Association, who helped the Day brothers to shape up the first herd that they drove to Canada. When subjected to a fire assay, many of Mr. Henry's criticisms of "North of 36" are equally absurd.

A YOUNG doctor took me to task regarding an incident in one of my books—where the hind knee-joint of a heavy beef, bogged in quicksand, was twisted out of place, or off, at least broken. We had dug out three of the animal's feet, lashed them up securely, but the fourth one, directly under the mired beef, could not be reached by the arm of a man. Ropes, from the beef's horns, attached to the pommels of four saddles, on mounted horses, failed, on a straight-ahead pull, to extricate the fourth foot. The motive power was capable of

moving one-half the weight of the four horses, but the grip of the quicksands defeated our ends. The men gradually swung around, the horses pulling their last ounce on several angles, the sand well up on the beef's side. On the last pull, on a direct right-angle, something gave way and on dragging the beef out of the quicksand and freeing him, the fourth leg dangled, unjointed at the knee, calling for a humane shot to end the animal's life.

I was foreman of the herd, on the trail, where this incident occurred, and felt justified in using it. The trouble with my young doctor was that he knew the joint was protected by ligaments, but had no idea of the vise-like grip of quicksand. In our friendly discussion of the question I asked him if he thought he could pull the brush of a cow's tail out, when mired in quicksand. He was confident that he could. On being advised that I had often tried and always failed, though a husky youth during the trail days, he seemed to doubt my statement. On being questioned if he thought he was physically a better man than myself, although my years were double his, he smiled dissentingly when I offered to take him into the middle of the street, or into the park, or into his own back yard, and lay him on the flat of his back, as often as it was necessary or until he gave up the idea. The trouble with our critics is, what little they know is theoretical and not practical. My doctor, if still doubtful, may take a seat by the side of Mr. Henry.

THE motive for Mr. Henry's attack on "North of 36" is not clear. If he wishes to render a service to The Pioneers of America, Inc., let him start a missionary work in his home town. The Eastern viewpoint of the West, and the Western viewpoint of the same, are as wide apart as the poles. Broadcast the statement that it required as good business ability to amass a fortune in cattle, in the old West, as it did among the merchant princes in New York City. Make this your slogan, and every State historical society west of the Mississippi River will rally to your aid and you will be hailed as the great emancipator of a truth. The demand for a lurid West comes from the East. Where Westerners saw only a primal land in its virgin beauty, our Eastern cousins must have their West "wild and wooly." So long as a demand for the lurid West exists, it will be written to order, and publishing mills, in meeting a popular demand, will grind out the grist.—ANDY ADAMS.

A FURTHER word from Mr. Adams, in a personal letter to George W. Saunders, published in the *Pioneer:*

Colorado Springs, Colorado.

What gets me is, what motive did this man Henry have in attacking Mr. Hough's "North of 36?" The latter was a veteran writer, with over thirty books to his credit, the greater portion of them Westerners. If M. Henry wanted to expose his ignorance in regard to the old West, he made a killing. If the motive is personal and he waited until after Mr. Hough's death, he ought to be smoked out of his hole and made to show his hand. . . .

Possibly you never noticed it, but the Texan transplants well. Many of them came up with cattle and never went home. You will find them on the Yellowstone River in Montana. This upper country broadens him out and he rounds into a —— of a good man. In handling cattle, he blots out the old Mason and Dixon line, because he was the best "what am."—ANDY ADAMS.

TO THE *Pioneer* we are indebted for the following collection of opinions from well known writers of Western fiction:

McLEOD RAINE: "There is no need to write a defense of Emerson Hough. He was in and of the West. He told in fiction the epic story of its making. What he has written speaks for itself. I have heard old-timers say that 'North of 36' made the old days relive for them; that while reading it they smelt again the dust of the herd and tasted the smoke of vanished camp-fires." It was in 1881 that Hough located in White Oaks, New Mexico. The guns of the Lincoln County cattle war were still echoing in New Mexico. Billy the Kid, most notorious outlaw ever known in the West, was still dodging in the chaparral close to the village where Hough was a reporter on the White Oaks *Golden Era.* "Seems to me that forty years in the West ought to make a 'feller's feet tough.' "

J. FRANK DAVIS, San Antonio, noted writer: "I had heard the old-timers hereabout comment enthusiastically on Hough's story. Hough had many personal friends among the old cattlemen here in San Antonio, who know by experience what made a man's feet tough and welcomed him to the inner circle of those who have their knowledge at first hand.

"At the suggestion of soft-voiced, mild-mannered elderly men who are now capitalists, stockmen, jurists, bankers, peace officers and such in Texas but who once marched—or, rather, rode—through exactly such 'pageantry' as Hough depicts and Henry sneers at, a number of newspapers hereabouts have expressed themselves on the subject. One of them said the other day, in an editorial that started off by remarking that the *International Book Review* had committed 'literary sabotage':

" 'Texans who have no other authority than moving daily among the scenes of Mr. Hough's novel and knowing some of the people who lived the Iliad that he wrote, disagree with Mr. Henry so violently that he would probably decorate one of the unrealistic trees of the old Chisholm Trail if he could be extradited for his offense. . . . We feel that if the editor of the *Literary Digest* had been able to see (as the writer has seen) wrinkled, weather-beaten cattlemen, who probably never heard of Mr. Henry, gravely debating and enthusiastically approving point after point of Mr. Hough's story and mentally re-enacting its dramatic moments, he would offer a public apology to the memory of the man his great publication has damaged."

ANDY ADAMS, noted writer of Western stories dealing with the pioneer cattle trail and cowboy life, writes:

"There must be a motive behind Mr. Henry's attack. Let me say that every tie of friendship urges me to come to the defense of Emerson Hough. I was with him in St. Luke's Hospital, in your city when there was a question if the operation, which finally claimed his life, could be stayed. He advised me that he had made arrangements with his

publishers, in the event he did not survive, that I was to finish 'North of 36,' then well under way."

Apropos to Mr. Stuart Henry's first flat-footed statement that no historial characters except Wild Bill Hickok appear in "North of 36," Mr. Adams opines that Chisholm, blazer of the famous "Chisholm Trail," was probably overlooked by the critic. He goes on to tell of still another:

"A third real character in 'North of 36' is Jos. G. McCoy (*McCoyne* in the Story). It was McCoy's foresight that founded the Abilene market and induced the Texas herds to drive to that point. He was the Moses that led the cattle of Texas out of the wilderness. The Lone Star State should erect a monument to his memory."

CHARLES A. SIRINGO, also takes vehement issue with Stuart Henry's assertion that Emerson Hough was a tenderfoot. Mr. Siringo, who knew "Billy the Kid" well enough to drink with him in the olden days and who later wrote the history of the noted outlaw and who knew the Texas cattle trails, it is alleged, as few living men knew them, gives the weight of authority to his statement:

"Emerson Hough was far from being a 'tenderfoot.' He had seen the West in all its phases from the early winter of 1881 when I first met him in the Hurrah gold mining camp of White Oaks, Lincoln County, New Mexico. He was then a reporter on the White Oaks *Golden Era* newspaper.

"Seems to me that forty years in the West ought to make a feller's feet tough.

"It was in 1867 that I began to work for wages as a cowboy. Therefore I ought to be able to judge the story, 'North of 36.' It is as near to real life as it is possible to write fiction."

EUGENE MANLOVE RHODES, whose twenty-five years in the saddle later qualified him to write the distinguished fiction that so ably portrays the West and its people—"The Little Eohippus," "Good Men and True," "Copperstreak Trail," and many others—also endowing him with authority to reply through the *International Book Review* to the assault on Emerson Hough's memory and works, writes:

" 'As to the frontiersmen, if they were "forlorn," then the joker is forlorn when you draw it to a bobtail flush; if they were "weary," it is curious to remember that all stranger men described them, not without bitterness, as insensible to fatigue; and if these men were "weazened," Ty Cobb is a runt. I knew them well. They were five feet eleven, they weighed one hundred and sixty-four pounds, and they were made of watch springs, whalebone and dynamite. But they were not pot-bellied. Perhaps that is what Mr. Henry meant.' "

FROM Charles M. Russell, known all over the world as an artist of the West, partly because he has lived most of his life among cow-people.

Great Falls, Montana.

Mr. Henry says: "There was never a cattle trail from the Gulf to nearer than 600 miles of the Canadian line." All early herds in Montana came from the south and many of them wore Texas irons. There were no railroads then; cows don't fly and anything that walks makes tracks, and tracks make trails.

Andy Adams, who wrote "The Log of a Cowboy" (the best trail story I ever read) came with a herd from Texas to Badger Creek Agency, Montana, which is not far from the Canadian line—70 miles to be exact.

There are quite a few old trail-hands living in Montana today—one, Ted Abbott, a friend of mine known to old-timers as Teddie Blue, is still with cows on his ranch near Gilt Edge, Montana, and he knows more of the old trail days than any man I know.

I'VE lived in Montana forty-four years—most of 'em around cow-people. Montana is still my home. All through the 'eighties and 'nineties I worked with cow outfits. Most all of the cowmen of those days know me. According to Mr. Henry the outfits would have been called "steer outfits," but in my country folks said "cow men," "cow-punchers," "cow-horses" or "cow-ponies," and "cow-country." Even steers were spoken of as "beef."

Mr. Henry says it would have taken lots of money to finance such a herd as Hough tells about in "North of 36." In the first place he is wrong because there was mighty little money of any kind in Texas at that time; and in the second place the story says the girl owner was broke and at the mercy of a band of cow thieves, so she was forced to gather everything she owned:—horses, cattle, etc.,—even a trunk of keepsakes, and leave that section in order to sell what she could. Either that or stay and see her cattle go into the hands of other men.

OLD Texas men tell me they could generally count on beef, beans, meal or flour and coffee with sometimes sorghum. All but the coffee was raised on the spot and if a fellow wanted sugar he generally took "long sweetenin'." With beef on the hoof and antelope all over that section, it looks like the big item on the provision list was settled. The rest they had raised or traded or borrowed from "neighbors" and the word meant something in that State then—and now, from what I've heard. Cowmen were handy with guns; and a good gun with salt were about the only costly items toward getting a meal at that time.

When I first went to Montana all grub came by boat to Fort Benton and from there it was freighted with bull, horse or mule teams to other towns and stage stations. Cow outfits lived plain but good; coffee, sugar, beans, salt-pork (called sowbelly, or sow-vest), flour or corn-meal, dried apples, prunes and sometimes butter that came in caddies—the kind you could find in the dark—filled the bill, and Teddy Blue always said we lived high alongside of Texas outfits. We always had beef and often wild meat.

EMERSON HOUGH loved the wild country and was a friend of many men who lived and made the history of the West. Hough looked for romance and mixed it with history, back-tracking in a country where the trails were often plowed under and the romance died when the plow turned the country grass side down. I think he stayed pretty close to the old trails and their land marks.

Mr. Henry belonged to a loan and trust company and, while I know nothing of him personally, I do know that many old-timers who have since graduated into such organizations got their start in the

days when they charged two per cent. a month on a loan of a hundred dollars if your ranch was worth ten thousand and would trust you if both your legs were broken and you didn't have a wagon. Their kind are about as romantic and sentimental as a tractor plow.

I wouldn't have taken sides in this paper fight but when Mr. Henry started to hamstring a friend of mine, and a dead man, I got ringy. Alfred Henry Lewis said that a critic was to an artist like a flea to a dog—he lived off of the dog and didn't do him any good.—C. M. RUSSELL.

FROM E. E. Harriman, of our writers' brigade and A. A.:

Los Angeles.

As a pioneer of the early days in Minnesota, 1862 to 1884, inclusive, and a resident of California for 38 years, with some considerable experience among pioneers in Kansas and Utah, Arizona and Oregon, I object to the criticism of Emerson Hough by Mr. Henry. I object to his attempt to picture the pioneers.

His drawing is away off, wrong in line and wrong in shading. His colors are mixed with prejudice and ignorance in equal parts.

I WAS in Kansas in 1884, during which year 300,000 cattle were driven north over the Chisholm Trail. I did not see Abilene, but I met one of its former marshals, one who killed 14 bad men and gave each one first chance to flash his gun. I met some of the men who drove cattle to Abilene. I met many pioneers who were there in the sixties and seventies. I want to say right here and now that in his description of the "weary, forlorn, weazened" pioneers, he slanders a lot of fine people. Weazened? Huh!

I sat on a porch in front of a boarding-house in Kansas one day with one of those weazened pioneers. He stood 6-1 in bare soles. He had a smooth, untroubled countenance. His laugh was contagious and his smile would make a woman love him. The children climbed over him and bossed him around, while he enjoyed it immensely.

I met women who pioneered there, plump, alert, clear-eyed, handsome women, who had lived in sod shanties and dugouts during the first days. Sordid lives? They lived as they had to, in a savage country, where there was no timber to be had and where all the conveniences had to be hauled many miles in wagons, with armed men guarding the loads against Indian attacks, but they kept improving conditions and gathering gear until they asked no odds from any.

IF THE pioneers of the far West lived sordid lives and were "weazened, weary, forlorn" creatures, so must have been those who broke trails into Ohio and the Mississippi valley. So must have been the pioneers everywhere west of the Alleghany Mountains. If the diatribe of Stuart Henry applies to the pioneers of Kansas, it must apply to all pioneers of our country.

Let any one living, who is more than fifty years old, think back and recall the elderly people whom he knew, who helped open up the wild sections of our land. Will he remember sordid people? Will he recall forlorn faces? Not by many leagues he won't.

Anyhow, does a residence in Denver give Stuart Henry an especial insight into Kansas affairs and people? Not so you could notice it with a high-powered microscope. It is the provincialism of New York City that talks when Stuart Henry hammers his typewriter.

I KNOW men who were intimately acquainted with Wild Bill and from them I have learned that he was a conscientious officer of the law, that he did much to smooth the way for law enforcement, yet I read in Stuart Henry's criticism that "Wild Bill spent his time in gambling and gave no attention to laws or jails."

Wherein Mr. Henry flatly contradicts statements made to me by men who knew Wild Bill personally which Stuart Henry did not and does not claim to have done. My own experience among pioneers proves his estimate of pioneer men and women absolutely false. He must be thinking of some few so-called "crackers" from the South. I have seen a few of these and they fitted his description, but they did not in any sense represent the pioneers. They were a small minority in a large assemblage.

AS FOR the criticism of Emerson Hough's language, where he is accused of using twentieth century expressions among those of the last century, there may be a few cases where a little slipped in, but mainly his dialogues run true to my memory.

Taking up his charge of inaccuracy, read what Emerson Hough set at the end of the first instalment of "North of 36," in the *Saturday Evening Post*: "Fiction can not be exact, else it would be history, not fiction." There you have it, just as it should be.

Stuart Henry has put his foot in it, clear up to his knee. He has attempted to discredit a man who knew his West far better than did his critic. I know men who knew Hough and they say that he rode all over that country on a cayuse, that he gathered data carefully, that he painted an accurate picture. What did Stuart Henry do? Sat in an office in Denver for a time. Went back to the east coast and held down another swivel chair.

Which is more worthy of credence, the man who saddled a bronc and scoured the country, to get facts, or the man who used a long-range telescope to prove the rider in error?

With Texas men who rode that trail, men who were cowboys at the time of Tasie Lockhart's ride to Abilene, saying the story is the most perfect picture of the time possible, it looks as though the attempt to discredit Emerson Hough is a dud.—E. E. HARRIMAN.

FROM Hugh Pendexter, who, though not a pioneer, has made a lifelong study of our country's history, is recognized as an authority and has probably done more than any other writer to embody our history in fiction form accurately and reliably:

Norway, Maine.

I am not familiar with the history of cattle trails and trade and can not comment on that portion of Mr. Henry's article. But I do take exceptions to the back-handed swat he gives Wild Bill Hickok.

WHY wasn't Wild Bill "that kind of a man?" Mr. Henry says he wasn't but we need something more than his *ipse dixit*. Being somewhat of an admirer of Hickok, I would like to be shown. I do not know whether Hickok was marshal of Abilene, but he was marshal of other towns just as wild, and he cleaned them up and ran out the bad men. "The Covered Wagon" was written for fiction with an historical background. For the sake of the plot the author was licensed to take some liberties. If I remember correctly it was Conan Doyle who anticipated a battle by several years to tighten up the action of one of his stories. The liberty taken was explained in the preface.

Mr. Henry doesn't tell why, or how, Hickok wasn't the kind of man Hough pictured: Simply says he wasn't and states he "spent his time gambling in his saloon headquarters." Whose saloon? Headquarters for what? Many reputable men enjoyed card-playing for money in Hickok's day, just as they do today. Whether gambling is an indiscretion or some thing very reprehensible, it is a pastime enjoyed by some of our most proudly proclaimed citizens. He says he "manifested no interest in laws and jails." He should know that a marshal's gun was the "law" in wild railroad-towns and cattle-towns back in the 60's and early 70's. As for jails, few frontier towns had one. A marshal held office because of his dexterity with a gun.

MR. HENRY takes a needless slap at a dead man by closing his brief remarks on Hickok with, "Instead of being sentimental about his white wife back East, if she existed, he dwelt in marital bliss with a squaw." Does he know that?

Gen. Geo. A. Custer immortalized "California Joe," just as Frémont's reports made Kit Carson renowned. Custer, Merrit and Carr made Hickok and Cody famous. Col. Richard Dodge selects Amos Chapman for his favorite scout but speaks well of the above mentioned. In regard to Hickok here is what Gen. Custer has to say of him in his "My Life on the Plains," pps. 33-4.

". . . I had with me a detachment of white scouts, and one of friendly Indians. Of the Indians only one could speak English and he acted as interpreter for the party. Among the white scouts were numbered some of the most noted of their class. The most prominent man among them was "Wild Bill." "Wild Bill" was a strange character, just the one the novelist might gloat over. He was a plainsman in every sense of the word, and yet unlike any other of his class. In person he was about six feet one inch in height, straight as the straightest of the warriors whose implacable foe he was; broad shoulders, well-formed chest and limbs, and a face strikingly handsome (follows more description). Add to this figure a costume blending the immaculate neatness of the dandy with the extravagant taste and style of the frontiersman, and you have Wild Bill, then, as now, the most famous scout on the plains . . . . Of his courage there could be no question: it had been brought to a test on too many occasions to admit of a doubt. His skill in use of rifle or pistol was unerring; while his deportment was exactly the opposite of what might be expected of a man of his surroundings. It was entirely free from all bluster and bravado. He seldom spoke of himself unless requested to do so. His conversation, strange to say, never bordered on the vulgar or blasphemous. His influence among the frontiersmen was unbounded. His word was law; and many are the personal disturbances and quarrels which he has checked among his comrades by his simple announcement, 'this has gone far enough.' . . . Wild Bill is anything but a quarrelsome man; yet no one but himself can enumerate the many conflicts in which he has been engaged, and which almost invariably have resulted in the death of his adversary. I have a personal knowledge of at least half a dozen men he has at various times killed, one of these being a member of my own command. Wild Bill always carries two ivory handled revolvers of large size: he was never seen without them. Where this is the common custom brawls are seldom settled by blows. He who can draw and fire first is the best man. No civil law reaches him; none is applied for. In fact there is no law recognized beyond the frontier but that of 'might makes right.' . . . Yet in all of the many affairs of this kind in which Wild Bill has performed a part, and which have come to my knowledge, there is not a single instance in which the verdict of twelve fair-minded men would not be pronounced in his favor."

FROM the above it is obvious that none of the white scouts understood Injun enough to act as interpreter and that Wild Bill's alleged squaw was of a tribe not represented, or else he did not talk the language of any red men present. Custer found him, as did Hough, "one the novelist might gloat over." And he was the "implacable foe" of all hostile Indians. He was "immaculate" in dress and person, one of the last to live in "marital bliss with a squaw." He never bragged. He stopped quarrels. No homicide ever has been proved against him in which he did not have the law on his side and shoot in self-defense.

So much for Custer. Buffalo Bill always spoke enthusiastically of Hickok and was proud to call him his friend. I do not have at hand Mrs. Cody's articles printed in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, but I recall she made considerable mention of Hickok and always spoke most favorably of him. "Colorado" Charlie Utter, who knew Hickok long and intimately and who raised a monument over his grave, could not say enough good about the man. "Texas Jack" and others of the best of plainsmen never had anything but good to say of Hickok.

CODY, in his autobiography, tells of his friendship with Hickok from 1857, of their riding Pony Express, and of "the splendid service" done by Hickok "as a scout on the Western sector during the Civil War." I have not attempted to give an exhaustive endorsement of Hickok by U. S. Army officers, plainsmen, citizens, newspaper corrrespondents and special writers for magazines, who met and approved of Hickok. On my shelves and in my notes I have much more than I have given here. It would be repetition to copy them off. Some of these days let us have an article on "The Faults of Reviewers of Our Wild West Stories."—HUGH PENDEXTER.

BECAUSE he strongly desired not even to seem to seek self publicity in the matter, I have made no mention of Eugene Manlove Rhodes in this Hough-Henry controversy, but ordinary justice and decency

demand it should be made plain that he is far more responsible than any one else for the action taken to clear Hough's memory. Certainly whatever part *Adventure* has played is to be credited to him. I will add no more. He will probably berate me for saying even this much. But all the other friends of Emerson Hough, all the old-timers and others who have rallied to the defense of Hough and of a right understanding of the West know without any telling of mine that Mr. Rhodes is the man who made it his business to see that real facts were established and that Hough should be cleared of the charges against him.

Out of a letter from Mr. Rhodes I take the following, though I see no conscious injustice in Dr. Smyth's course. I did not see Mr. Rhodes letter, as originally drafted, to the *Review*, but if it contained personalities of an unpleasant nature probably I too should have cut them out. Mr. Henry's review could not be undone (beyond giving the other side of the case a hearing, which the *Review* did on several occasions) and it would not help to add offense to offense. But the fact remains, as Mr. Rhodes points out, that there had been "personalities," direct or to be inferred, in the review, and that they certainly do not seem justified by the testimony now being brought out. It seems to me, however, distinctly up to Mr. Henry, not to Dr. Smyth. The latter presumably asked Mr. Henry to review the book because he was presumably familiar with locale and material and competent to pass judgment. Mr. Henry seems to have "fallen down" on the assignment, but that kind of thing can happen to any editor however wise and just.

Dr. Smyth has a blind spot. From my protest against Mr. Henry's article he cut the heart, lungs, intestines and other vital organs, on the ground that the *International Book Review* desired to shun personalities.

It did not strike him that any personality was involved in branding Emerson Hough as a faker, conscious and deliberate, and as one who faked and who wrote for no motive save gain: and as *one whose knowledge of the cattle trails was evened with that of a largely sober "drummer" playing* pinochle in the smoking-car, as his train crosses where once the trail herds went. Some personalities, I calls it. Emerson Hough dead, too—couldn't speak up and say how many years of careful research had gone to the "rapid writing" of this book.

Curious. I sent Webbs' admirable reply—(and others) to the *Bookman*, to New York *Evening Post Literary Review*, New York *Times ditto ditto*, to "Book Pages" of Chicago *News* and many others. All in vain; they were taken up with the books of Qwert Yuiop and Etaoin and Gum Tragacanth. The only "literary" notice of the matter was in the Chicago *Post* and Los Angeles *Times*. We had to seek redress through *Adventure* and the *Dearborn Independent*.

The *Literary Digest*, featuring the attack upon the memory of this dead man and upon the dead map-makers of whom he wrote, had no space for the defense.

ANOTHER bit from the same writer, ironically identifying himself with the intelligentzia. For the benefit of those so fortunate as not to know, "intelligentzia" as used here is a vague term for vague people whose interest centers on the parasitic growths from anything decayed in anything wholesome and who consider said anything wholesome excessively dull and beneath their notice. At their best they play with orchids, at their worst with sewage. But by no chance do they deal with the normal, vital, wholesome things of life. Starting with abnormalities, they go on from there. . . .

The evidence seems to be clear that Mr. Hough has depicted truly:

1. The last-ditch situation of Texas in the late sixties.
2. The brief infamies of Texas carpet baggers.
3. The beginning, or, as we of the intelligentzia would say, the inception, of the cattle drives.
4. Life on the trail. Pioneer character.
5. A picture of the typical Trail's End town, of which Abilene was the first.

(Not to mention the army. We never mention the army.)

All these pictures are spirited and truthful. But the events which the book packs into four or five months covered something like three years in the actual happening of them. That was the ground chosen for attack. But the real offense of the book was that it showed mere Americans as admirable, their activities not without results of a sort. This is not to be tolerated! We all damned the last half of Willa Cather's "One of Ours" because it showed one American as rather a decent chap after all—and now this man Hough is doing it again! Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Up, guards and at 'em!

STILL farther along in the same letter, referring to critical or literary injustices in fiction to other sections of the country:

I have never seen any books so false to the Mid-West as "Winesburg, Ohio" and "The Triumph of the Egg." Yet Sherwood Anderson is acclaimed as "the authentic voice of America." An Ohio town without baseball, without boys neck-full of the Old Harry, without joy or pride or hope or jealousy or vainglory or laughter—piffle!

WHAT Mr. Rhodes is really saying in these last two excerpts is that there has grown up a large group of critics, writers and "literary" appreciators who have become so obsessed with various "highbrow" points of view that they have lost all sight of real facts and real values, and so possessed by the ambition to be very literary that they have ceased to be normal, thereby automatically becoming unable to be anything but abnormal and undependable, utterly lost to all sense of proportion. Whether Mr. Henry belongs in that class I do not know. In the Sherwood Anderson case the critical verdict of the intelligentzia is rabidly favorable. I've not read any of his books, but if any of them pictures an Ohio town as Mr. Rhodes indicates, it sounds to me as if the critics either knew nothing whatever about Ohio towns or had in this case entirely divorced themselves from truth and facts for the sake of wallowing in excrescences. I was born and raised in a small Ohio city, lived some five years in two small Ohio towns and visited friends and relatives in various others. One of those towns happens to be, I understand, the original from which Winesburg was drawn—at least a town in which Mr. Anderson lived for a while.

Whatever the true values in Mr. Anderson's case, and whatever Mr. Henry's relation to the intelligentzia, I can not resist giving space to Mr. Rhodes' point of view on these latter gentry. It does seem that the critics were too busy with various very highbrow matters to be concerned with anything so banal as this country's history or anything so dull as reliability or fairness.

FOR whom is Pike's Peak named? One of us says Raymond W. Thorp was wrong in stating in the magazine that it was Zebulon, and maintains it was Albert. Mr. Thorp stands by his guns and seems to have the authorities on his side.

Chicago.

In your issue of July 30th appeared a very interesting article on early river navigation by Mr. Raymond W. Thorp. This article state that Pike's Peak was named for General Zebulon M. Pike, for whom the steamboat was named.

THE headwaters of the Arkansas River were explored and mapped by Albert Pike, and Pike's Peak was named for him. I am inclined to think that Albert Pike was a son of Zebulon Pike.

Albert Pike was one of the most romantic characters of the pioneer southwest. He was a soldier, explorer, lawyer and poet and a success at all.

As a soldier he attained the rank of general. As an explorer he made important geographical maps in the Mexican cession. As a lawyer he was paid, at Ft. Smith, Arkansas, in currency, $100,000 for effecting an amicable settlement of a difference between the Government and the five civilized tribes who occupied what is now the State of Oklahoma. A peculiar and amusing incident with reference to the payment of this fee was that the general who paid the $100,000 out of money sent for settlement with the Indians forgot that he had paid Pike the money and was out of balance for several days until reminded of it. This was a record breaker for lawyers up to that time.

As a poet Albert Pike wrote several beautiful numbers from which stands out his "Every Year," a wonderfully finished ode, of deep sentiment, perfect diction and rhythm.

Albert Pike Consistory of the Masonic order, located at Little Rock, Arkansas, is a grand piece of modern architecture, while the old Pike Mansion, colonial style, is a grand old landmark in the same city.—ED. LINDSEY.

Charleston, South Carolina.

I am not a deep student of history, but I have read literally hundreds of articles and books which state that Zebulon M. Pike discovered Pike's Peak. I suppose I could sort out twenty-five without much trouble right here within a few feet of my "settee," but it is hardly necessary to go to such extremes. Needless to say, Mr. Lindsey is dead wrong; the United States school histories teach that he is.

Now, here is the origin of the article he mentioned, or source of my information—I copied it verbatim with the permission of the Secretary of the State Historical Society of Missouri, Mr. Floyd C. Shoemaker, from the "Missouri Centennial Exposition & State Fair Booklet, 1821-1921, pages 44 and 45. At the bottom of page 44 is the line in dispute: "The captain of the boat was Jacob Reed, and the boat was named in honor of General Zebulon M. Pike, the explorer, after whom, also, was named Pike's Peak, Colorado." It has not been so long since I attended school, either, and the United States history said the same thing, and does yet, I suppose. If this is incorrect, it is high time we make a few changes among the school historians.

I would like Mr. Lindsey to tell me where I could get a copy of the work which states that Albert Pike discovered Pike's Peak in Colorado.

In the "Colorado Travelog," page 4, second column, about three inches down, the statement occurs: "Romance is woven into adventure such as filled the expedition of Lieut. Zebulon Montgomery Pike, who, in 1806, discovered Pike's Peak."

In the November, 1922, issue of the *Colorado Pioneer*, heading an article on page 16, we find this: "Colorado is unfolding its long hidden realities. The prospector of early days seemingly unearthed Aladdin's magic lamp for its gold, scattered everywhere. Zebulon Montgomery Pike thrilled at the sight of the snowy sentinel named for him, rising to heaven from the Indians' Springs of Manitou. The heroic soldier-explorer got his first glimpse Nov. 15, 1806, and adventurers found it an overland marker in the mad rush for the yellow metal discovered in California in '49."

Is it necessary for me to quote further?—RAYMOND W. THORP.

A PARAGRAPH from a letter mainly concerned with other things. To what extent is the American merchant marine manned by Americans?

I am an enthusiastic supporter of our merchant marine (when it is an honest-to-God American one and not a Chinese merchant marine with the American flag trailing astern). And it seems to me that in all the controversy about the "treatment" given the American seafaring man under the La Follette Act nothing is being brought out about the extra-hazardous nature of the employment—it is at least as hazardous as railroading—and further, and more important, nothing about loyalty to the Government whose flag flies over the ships. A fine merchant marine we shall have to turn over to the Government in time of emergency if it is loaded down with everything but Americans! I am glad to see that the Shipping Board is doing something to straighten this matter out by insisting on preference being given to Americans on its ships clearing from the West Coast.—JAMES V. MURRAY.

ANOTHER comrade with the right spirit—feels he oughtn't to do nothing at our Camp-Fire except listen. As to North American snakes not attacking man unless molested, how about the copperhead? Think common reputation in eastern Ohio and Pennsylvania is to the contrary, though the only specific case I can recall, told me by the doctor who treated him, was that of a man sitting quietly on a log who, after being there some time, was bitten from the rear by a copperhead. The word of the doctor is beyond suspicion and, while I do not know the man, there seems no motive for his lying as to the circumstances—in those regions the copperhead has few friends.

Los Angeles, California.

I read with interest Mr. Payne's article on snakes appearing in the May 10th issue. I don't claim to be an expert on snakes by any means, but I have always been interested in them.

HE MENTIONS the racer in his article as "taking after one." This, I think, is incorrect; I have never known a snake on the North American Continent to chase anybody. Even the diamond back rattler—and I think you'll agree with me that this snake is one mean hombre—will seek safety in flight if given the chance, rather than attack a man. Try it and see if I'm not right; don't attack the snake, just watch it and if it won't uncoil and beat it, I'll eat it. The African mamba (family of vipers) the king cobra of India, and the fer de lance of South America are the only snakes known to attack a man, in preference to seeking flight.

THE blowing viper which he claims is poisonous, is I'm sure the common hog-nosed snake (*Heterodon Platyrhimus*). This snake is non poisonous. It has in addition to its regular teeth, two large fang-like teeth in the back of the upper jaw. These are very often mistaken for fangs and are used, as far as is known, for holding its prey, which is very active, frogs and toads. The snake is short, thick, ugly and vicious looking, but quite harmless.

When disturbed it dilates its body, which makes it look powerfully mean, coils, and hisses like a locomotive. Put your hand in reach of its strike and you'll be surprised to find it will not even bite. Pick the snake up and it will feign death. Tie it in a knot, do most anything with it and do it again, but put it on its belly and it will roll over on its back, and do this repeatedly. It is really funny.

The snake seems to think—if they do think—that to be really dead it must be on its back, belly up. Leave Mr. Hog-Nose in the road, walk a short distance away, hide yourself and watch the result. The snake will roll over on its belly, raise his head to see if the coast is clear, and then beat it! The name "hog-nosed" is derived from the peculiar shape of its nose; it is truly a hog-nose.

THE only horned snake I ever saw, and I've seen plenty, is the side-winder rattlesnake, found extensively through the desert country, *Crotalus Cerastes*. The color of the critter is yellowish brown with a series of dull brown blotches extending down its back. Over each eye is a short horn, which is really an elongation of the upper eye-shield. The gait of this snake is very queer. When agitated it throws loops of its body forward, one following the other, and really walks on an oblique to the direction in which its head is pointing; it is very peculiar. The only reason I can see is in the nature of the ground. The snake is usually found in sandy country, sand is soft and yielding and offers no resistance to the crawling plates on a snake's belly, so the reptile has to go that way when in a hurry.

AS REGARDS the milk-drinking ability of a snake. I have never seen and I don't know any one who has seen a snake stealing milk from a cow. Maybe it has been done, but I never saw or heard of an eye witness to such a stunt. The milk snake is really the king snake (*Ophibolus doliatus*), and is rally a gentle and perfectly harmless snake. It is a constrictor like the famuos boa of South America, and feeds principally on rats, gophers and mice, usually haunting barns, etc., in search of its prey.

But can you imagine a snake four feet long, even if they do drink milk—and I never saw one do that, though I have tried to get them to do it several times—stealing enough milk from a cow so as to make a difference in the quantity of milk the beast will yield! I think that about three spoonfuls of water would fill a snake up, and yet, with all due respect to Mr. Payne (he is probably a better snake man than I am), people will believe this thing, accept it as a fact and kill a useful creature.

THE jaws of a snake are three in number, two lowers and an upper, the upper being the same as ours; the lowers are joined by a cartilage. The jaws, upper and lower, are armed with very fine needle-like teeth, all pointing inward. Snakes' teeth are good for holding their prey only. When a rat or other prey is caught, the lower jaws move over the prey, first one then the other, till the animal caught is engulfed far enough for the throat muscles to start a constricting movement. A snake can distend its jaws to a remarkable degree. I once

saw a large gopher snake swallow a rat that was three times as thick as its own body. The feat was performed with ease, the rat making a large lump in the middle of the snake's body after being completely swallowed.

Snakes are fascinating creatures, very beautiful and very clean, no fleas or lice like in so many animals. They are not slimy, contrary to the general opinion, being very firm and cool to the touch. I like them fine.

I hope this has not bored you, but I felt that I had to write it. I have been a silent member of Camp-Fire for a number of years and felt that I ought to claim the light of the Fire for a few seconds.—FOSTER LLOYD.

QUITE a number of you were thoughtful enough to send Camp-Fire the news of the death of Buck Taylor, well-known figure of the West. Here is a letter from a comrade who knew him during his last days. I think Camp-Fire stands to salute at the passing of this man.

Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

Turning back to July 10, 1923, issue containing a letter from Captain L. H. North regarding Buck Taylor, am sure that the Captain and other friends will be grieved by this statement.

W. L. Taylor departed this life on April 28, 1924, at the hospital in Chester County, Pennsylvania, after a short illness from pneumonia, following a severe cold and aggravated by an old gunshot wound through the lung, dating back to the Spanish-American war. By his own request he was buried at Valley Forge, where he had lived some time before his farm was taken over by the State as an addition to the Valley Forge Reservation. The funeral services were conducted by his old-time friend, Rev. Burke, pastor of the Episcopal Church at that place.

After the condemnation of his Forge property, Mr. Taylor came to Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, looking for a new farm location. This he found in adjacent Center County, near "Old Fort." This place being within easy reach of the Pennsylvania State College, Mr. Taylor made frequent visits to the little college town and, by reason of his commanding presence and striking individuality, "Buck" became an object of interest and a real friend to many of the students and the faculty.

He had frequent attacks of illness, most of which was attributable to the bullet-wound which he received when with Roosevelt's Rough Riders. Always a philosopher in his old days, he made many friends in this vicinity and kept them to the end. Never boastful or self-laudatory, he did not advertise his eventful life and it was a rare occurrence for him to even mention special incidents. One little statement he made is worth remembering, "A man can't have too many friends, but one enemy is one too many."

When he came to Huntingdon, the ever present broad-brimmed hat and his six-foot-four height were so unusual as to induce an old German resident to stop him on the street and anxiously inquire "Mister, vot's your business here?" With a straight face and an exaggerated show of caution, Buck stooped and whispered in his ear, "Don't tell anybody about it, but I am a burglar!" which so impressed the old man that he put in the rest of the week warning his neighbors against "dat big man."

One other little anecdote. During a severe attack of illness which he experienced in a sanitarium at State College, an old undertaker from an adjacent small town came to his bedside and asked for the job. Buck heard him out as to the nature of "the job" and then told him, "I won't be here, so you had better see my executors."

The last time I saw him, he was standing at the bars of one of his farm fields, a solitary figure, bulking big against the rays of the setting sun. To my greeting in passing, he doffed the wide brimmed hat to the ladies in the car in one of those sweeping gestures, so reminiscent of Cody's courtly introduction of the "Concourse of Rough Riders of the World."

And so passes Buck Taylor, one of the prominent figures of the real old days of spur and saddle in the Western country, now past and gone.—E. E. C. GIBBS.

AT THIS writing in September there are 684,500 boy scouts and scout officials in this country, with 2,000,000 former scouts. That is good. The Boy Scouts of America is only one organization that is training our youth, on a comprehensive scale, for good citizenship. I wish we had 100,000,000 scouts and ex-scouts.

One of their activities has been getting the voters to vote. In 1896 80% of our qualified voters voted; in 1900 73%; in 1912 62%; in 1920 it had fallen still more—to 49%. Less than half. Out of 54,165,907 qualified men and women 27,519,634 failed to perform their duty. Slackers.

Wealth, for nations as well as individuals, has always spelled decay unless relentlessly subordinated to ideals. We have wealth. We consider ideals "unpractical." Do you expect history to make, in our case, its first exception written on its pages? It won't.

Either we lift ourselves out of this sodden sea of materialism or else we die.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 24 T Wharf, Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL BUY: All back numbers containing stories by Leonard H. Nason.—Address H. H. YOUNG, 224 Marlborough Street, Boston, Mass.

WILL BUY: Copies containing stories by Leonard H. Nason.—Address H. E. MOORE, 8 Parker Avenue, Franklin, Pa.

WILL SELL: Mid-Nov. 1920, Mid-Jan. 1921, First- and Mid-July 1921, all from Mid-Aug. 1921 to July 10, 1924, July 30 and Sept. 30, 1924, 109 copies with covers intact. Best offer takes the lot.—Address MERLE SIMMONS, Lillie, La.

WILL SELL: 1916, 1917 and 1921 complete, one issue 1914, eleven 1915, six 1918, eighteen 1919, twenty-two 1920 and 1922 and thirty-three 1923. All in good condition at 10 cents a copy, buyer to pay carrying charges. Prefer not to break complete years.—Address M. F. EDWARDS, 6932 Kimbark Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscripts. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the second issue of each month. Address letters regarding stations to J. Cox.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(*See Lost Trails in the next issue*)

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

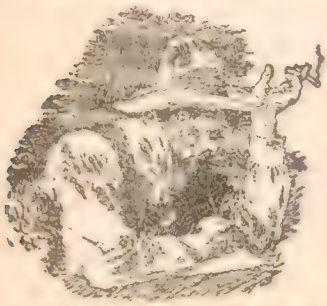
Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.



QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4, 5. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
6, 7. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
8. Australia and Tasmania
9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
10. New Guinea
11. Philippine Islands
12. Hawaiian Islands and China
13. Japan
14—17. Asia. In Four Parts
18—25. Africa. In Eight Parts
26. Turkey
27. Asia Minor
28—30. Balkans. In Three Parts
31. Scandinavia
32. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
33. Great Britain
34—36. South America. In Three Parts
37. Central America
38—39. Mexico. In Two Parts
40—46. Canada. In Seven Parts
47. Alaska
48. Baffinland and Greenland
49—54. Western U. S. In Six Parts
55—58. Middle Western U. S. In Four Parts
59—64. Eastern U. S. In Six Parts
Radio
Mining and Prospecting
Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
Salt and Fresh Water Fishing
Forestry in the United States
Tropical Forestry
Aviation
Army Matters, United States and Foreign
American Anthropology North of Panama Canal
First Aids on the Trail
Health-Building Outdoors
Standing Information

Water Monkeys

A LITTLE instance of the team work that is always being shown among the "A. A." men:

Question (to Mr. Holt:—"When I was in Port Said some two years ago I purchased two water monkeys, earthenware vessels with a spout and an additional opening on the opposite side, used by natives to keep water cool through evaporation, the earthenware evidently being porous.

One of the vessels was stolen from me, and the other dropped from its lashing and broke.

Can you tell me where I can obtain two or three more without going all the way back again? Do you happen to know the approximate price so that I can remit with my order?

Stamp and addressed envelope enclosed. Please 'blind' name and address if this article is used for publication.

A thousand thanks."—WM. WALLACE FLYNN, New York.

Answer, by Mr. Holt:—This *is* rather out of my department, and consequently I am forwarding it to *Adventure* with the request that it be referred for further information, to Mr. Moffat, who is better acquainted with Egyptian stuff than I.

Water jars of one shape or another, made of porous material, are used all through north Africa and in a good many other places of the world. I suspect that all hot countries have them and that there is not a great deal of difference between them. The principle of cooling water by evaporation is extremely ancient; probably as old as porous earthen vessels themselves, and naturally there is a very great similarity in form. I had water jars in Morocco which were of precisely the same shape and material—a baked red clay—as the Mexican *olla;* and the Mexican *olla* differs in no wise from most of the water jars of various southern Indian tribes. In short, they are all products of a very limited number of simple factors, the chief differences being a slight variation in shape. Most of the Mexican *ollas* are round-bottomed, with a rim around the top by which they may be hung—although a common manner of use is to set them in a three-pronged tree crotch or a similar artificial holder.

I realize that this does not answer your question. I can not tell you what would be the best way to replace your Egyptian jars—although I would suggest that you write to the American consul at Port Said—but on the chance that you desire to secure water jars, regardless of whether they came from Egypt or elsewhere, I will say that I think you will find it comparatively easy to secure Mexican *ollas*. They are not expensive; an *olla* a foot or more in diameter costs about fifty cents in Baja California. Of course there is a duty on them into the United States, and the freight or express to New York would be several times the original cost.

Further Answer, by Mr. Moffat:—I am fully acquainted with the water monkeys to which our inquirer refers; I have used them in the Sudan. They can be bought in different sizes and are called in the Sudan *gullas*. I suggest that the inquirer write to Messrs. Angelo Capato & Co., Khartum, and state his requirements and ask them to pack and forward two *gullas* to his address. The cost of the two will be about $1.50 plus cost of transportation. I am quoting a large size—about two feet high.

Trapping North of The Pas

THE fur is there; and so is the competition:

Question:—"I am looking for a suitable trapping site.

What are the laws of Canada concerning trapping and cost of license?

Where is the best trapping district of your territory? Wooded or open?

Could two men make money with a good trapping outfit? We would be new to the country but not new to the trapping game.

We wish to get in a country where we will have lots of elbow room.

What month should we leave Seattle?

Where is the best place to outfit, and about what would our outfit cost?

What game to be found?

Please add any other necessary information.

If published please omit name."— —— ——.

Answer, by Mr. Hague:—To get really good trapping grounds one has to go quite a distance from civilization.

The license fee for each person for a season's trapping is in Manitoba $100 for a non-resident of Canada. The Game Guardian, The Pas, will send a copy of the game laws on request.

The country north of The Pas is well furred; but there are a great many white and Indian trappers in the district, and one has to go quite a distance to secure a trapline not already taken up, and a man is lucky to make any real money at the game. Some of the trappers hardly manage to cover expenses many seasons. The country is fairly well wooded, although the timber is small and in a network of waterways. Travel by canoe in the Summer and dog-train in the Winter.

Best time to leave The Pas is late September or early October when a man can travel by canoe and locate his trapline, build his cabin before Winter sets in. Would estimate cost of outfit for two, including canoe and license fees for a season, at about $800. A man wants to go out well provided because he never knows what he is going to run into.

Principal fur-bearers are muskrat, beaver, otter, wolf, lynx, marten, mink, ermine, wolverine, bear, skunk, fox.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Wants a Buffalo Robe

PRICE, with dead buffalo complete, $200:

Question:—"Will you kindly advise me if you know where I can secure a buffalo hide in good condition, suitable for an automobile lap-robe?—RUSSELL D. KNIGHT, Philadelphia, Penn.

Answer, by Mr. Davis:—There is only one National bison range in Montana, and that is situated on the Flathead Indian Reservation. This contains a large number of buffalo at present, and I have received information to the effect that a number are to be killed off at some time within the near future. It will cost two hundred dollars to have one killed upon request. The authorities merely shoot it for the party desiring a buffalo and turn it over to him. You can obtain full information by writing Mr. Smith Riley, care of Florence Hotel, Missoula, Mont., giving him definite particulars as to just what it is you desire.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

THE following song, "James Bird," is not a folk-song, but because of its age and interest it deserves a place in the department. It was written at the beginning of the last century by a minor poet, and has lived ever since in the mouths of the people. They, however, played no part in its composition, nor have they changed it to any extent as they passed it on; it remains still, except for a few lines missing or a word changed here and there, essentially as it left the hand of its author.

It comes to the department from Mr. M. B. Schaeffer of Amherst, Ohio, who says:

"This song my mother has sung ever since I can remember. The 'Mary' mentioned in it she knew when she (my mother) was a little girl on the farm. As my mother told me the story, Commander Perry gave Bird permission to go home and see his folks. Several of the officers were jealous of Bird because he had won much praise from Perry by his gallantry during the action. Perry being absent at the time Bird attempted to go home, they passed a charge of desertion on him, gave him a hurried trial, and shot him before his friends could get word to Perry. This song always appealed to me as a youngster and I have never outgrown its appeal. I do not know how wide a circulation it had, my mother being the only one I ever heard sing it."

JAMES BIRD

(Sent in by M. B. Schaeffer)

Sons of freedom, wake to glory,
  And ye daughters, too, give ear,
You a sad and mournful story
  As was ever told shall hear.
Hull, you know, his troops surrendered,
  And defenceless left the West;
Then our forces quick assembled
  The invaders to resist.

Amongst the troop that marched to Erie
  Were the Kingston volunteers;
Captain Thomas them commanded
To protect our west frontier.
Tender were the scenes of parting,—
Mothers wrung their hands and cried,
Maidens wept their swains in secret,
  Fathers strove their grief to hide.

But there's one amongst the number
  Tall and graceful in his mien,
Firm his step, his look undaunted,—
  Scarce a nobler youth was seen.
One sweet kiss he snatched from Mary,
  Craved his mother's prayers once more,
Pressed his father's hands, and left them
  For Lake Erie's distant shore.

Soon they came where noble Perry
  Had assembled all his fleet;
There our gallant Bird enlisted
  The invader to resist.
Where is Bird? The battle rages!
  Is he in the strife or no?
Now the battle roars tremendous!
  Dare he face the hostile foe?

Oh behold him! See him, Perry!
  In that selfsame ship they fight!
Though his messmates fall around him
  Nothing can his soul affright.
But, behold! A ball has struck him.
  See the crimson current flow!
"Leave the deck!" exclaims brave Perry.
  "No," cries Bird, "I will not go!"

"Here on deck I took my station,
  Here will Bird his colors fly!
I'll stand by you, gallant captain,
  Till we conquer or we die!"
Fierce and deadly was the conflict
  Till our stars and stripes arose,—
Victory having crowned our effort,—
  All triumphant o'er the foe.

But did Bird receive a pension?
  Was he to his friends returned?
No, nor ever to his bosom
  Clasped the maid that he adored.
But there came most dismal tidings
  From Lake Erie's distant shore.
Better far if Bird had perished
  Midst the battle's awful roar.

"Dearest parents," read this letter,
  "It will bring sad news to you.
Do not mourn your first beloved,
  Though this brings his last adieu.
I must suffer for desertion
  From the brig *Niagary*.
Read this letter, sister, brother,
  'Tis the last you'll have from me."

Sad and gloomy was the morning
  Bird was ordered out to die.
Where's the heart not dead to pity
  But for him would heave a sigh?
See him march and bear his fetters,
  Harsh they clank upon the ear,
But his step is firm and manly,
  For his heart ne'er harbored fear.

See, he kneels upon his coffin,
  Sure his death can do no good!
Spare him! Hark!—Oh God they've shot him!
  See, his bosom streams with blood!

Farewell, Bird, farewell forever.
Home and friends he'll see no more,
For his mangled corpse lies bleeding
On Lake Erie's distant shore.

SEND all contributions of old songs, and all questions about them, direct to R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif. DO NOT send them to the magazine.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

DECEMBER 10TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete novel** and the **complete novelette** mentioned on the second contents page the next issue will bring you the following:

THE SHINING BLADE
By John Webb

THE LONG HEADED SAPSUCKER
By David Thibault

SHIFTED JUDGMENTS
By PW Timberlake

LEFT-HAND TWISTS By Roy Snider

WOLF MEDICINE
By Arenson Skinner

THE TROPHY OF THE 4th GUN SECTION
By Fairfax Downey

THE HOMESTEADERS By A Free Part Story Part II High Pendexter

Still Farther Ahead

THE three issues following the next will contain *long stories* by Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, Arthur D. Howden Smith, Georges Surdez, Gordon MacCreagh, Leonard H. Nason, Kingsley Moses, John Dorman, Charles Beadle, Frederick Moore and H. C. Bailey; and short stories by Chester L. Saxby, Charles Victor Fischer, Raymond S. Spears, Nevil Henshaw, Wm. Byron Mowery, Wolcott Le Clear Beard, Thomas Topham, James K. Waterman, James Parker Long, F. St. Mars, Alex McLaren, W. C. Tuttle and others; stories of Roman legions in the British Isles, French colonials in Africa, vikings in Norwegian waters, explorers on the Amazon, doughboys on the Western Front, Italian officers on the Sahara, wreckers off the Florida coast, diamond hunters in Africa, knights at arms in medieval France, pirates in the South Seas, adventurers the world around.

Frog Baby in the Haddon Hall Garden Court

A dash of salt sea air—

Days of seaside fun—

ENJOYED MOST at hospitable, homelike Chalfonte-Haddon Hall, Atlantic City.

These two most delightful of Atlantic City's famous hotels are really extraordinary in their hospitable personal attention—and *ahead* of the times in their modern facilities for pleasure, comfort and rest. American plan only; always open. Illustrated folder and rates on request.

LEEDS AND LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

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ATLANTIC CITY

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